

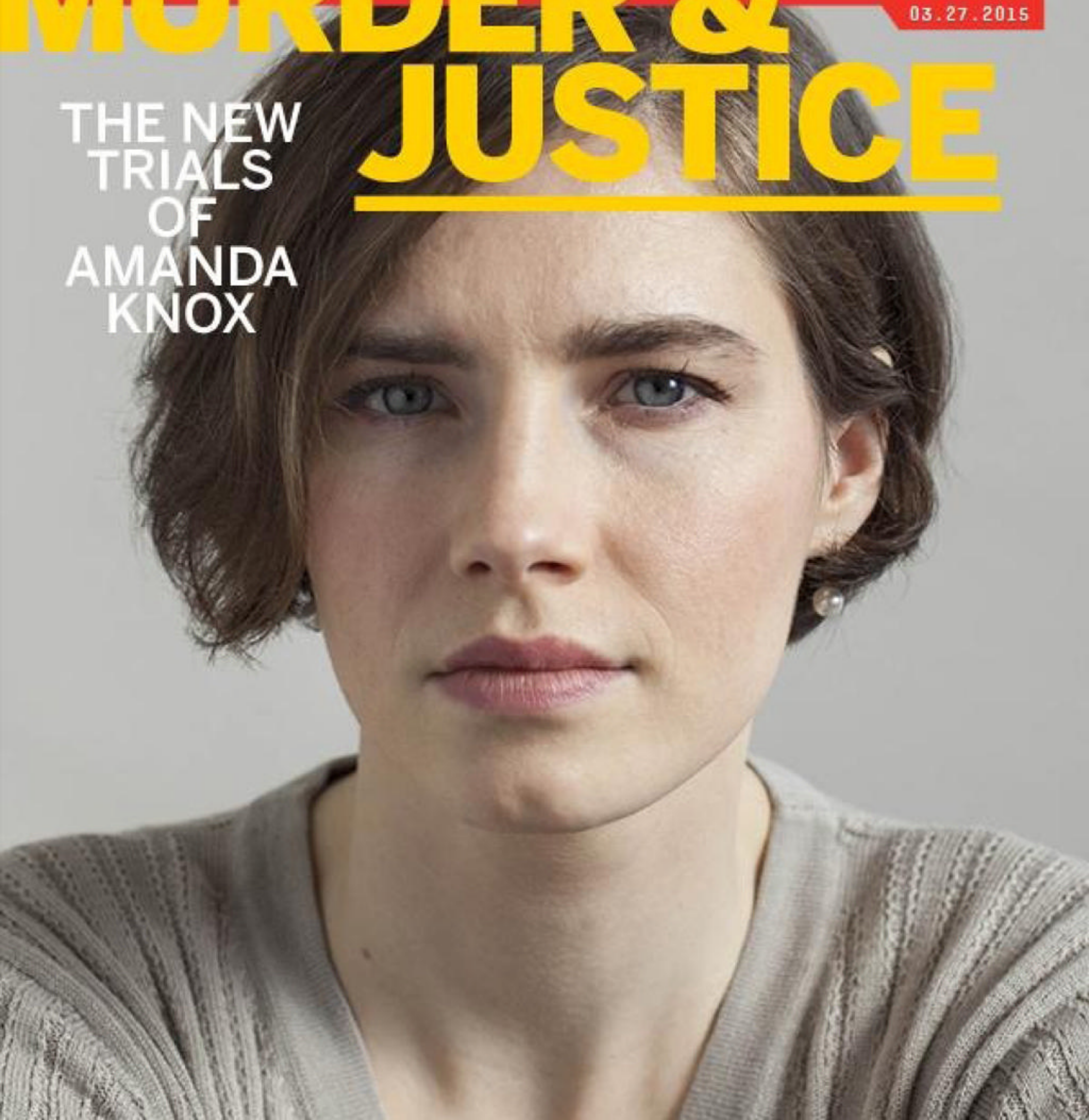
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Newsweek.

MURDER & JUSTICE

03.27.2015

THE NEW
TRIALS
OF
AMANDA
KNOX



Newsweek

FEATURES



WILL AMANDA KNOX BE DRAGGED BACK TO ITALY IN MURDER CASE?

Four years after she was cleared of murder charges, Amanda Knox faces extradition and another pummeling from Italy's legal system.

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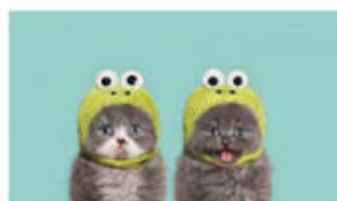


*CAMOUFLAGE
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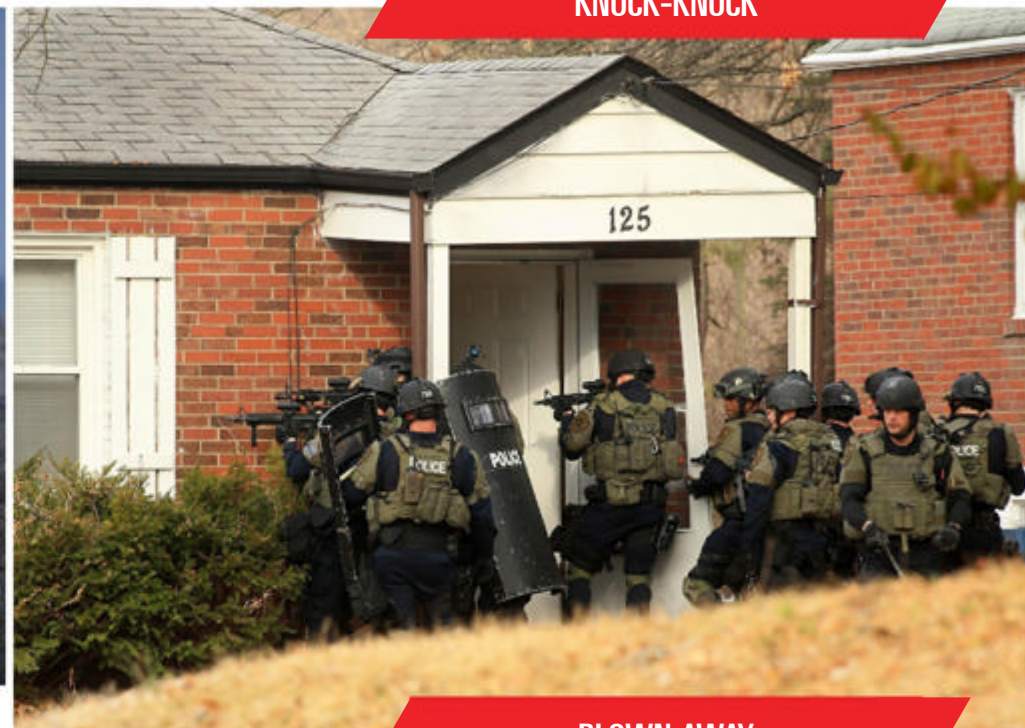
*JAMES CORDEN
HOPES TO
KEEP YOU UP
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BIG SHOTS

RAGGED GLORY



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BLOWN AWAY





Giorgio Benvenuti/Reuters

WILL AMANDA KNOX BE DRAGGED BACK TO ITALY IN MURDER CASE?

FOUR YEARS AFTER SHE WAS CLEARED OF MURDER CHARGES, AMANDA KNOX FACES EXTRADITION AND ANOTHER PUMMELING FROM ITALY'S LEGAL SYSTEM.

The scene in Perugia played out like a colorized version of that harrowing mob scene in *Frankenstein*—outraged villagers storming the castle to slay the monster who has

been terrorizing them. But this bogeyman was a pretty American exchange student sometimes known as Foxy Knoxy, and the villagers were modern-day Italians whipped to a froth by tabloid headlines about resplendent Satanic rituals and depraved sex.

In 2009, two years after the murder of a British student found half-naked, her throat slashed, and following a year-long trial, a Perugia judge and jury convicted Amanda Knox and two others of murder at mezzanotte—midnight. With a cold fog snaking over the cobbled piazza, they rendered their verdict in a medieval courtroom while seated beneath a peeling fresco of the Madonna, which may explain why all the lawyers in the room made appeals to God in their final arguments. Italian, British and American TV reported the denouement in breaking-news alerts, while outside, a mob shouted, “Assassina Americana!” and surged toward the doors of the courthouse, lacking only torches and pitchforks to make it a clip worthy of a Boris Karloff movie.

Knox languished in an Italian prison for four years before a judge overturned her conviction. When she was released, she immediately fled back to Seattle, where her family lives and where she resides today. But how long she’ll be able to stay there, or even whether she’ll be able to marry her fiancé, is suddenly up in the air. With an appeal hearing set for March 25, Italian judges are expected to issue a final ruling on whether Knox murdered her roommate in Perugia almost eight years ago. The ruling might baffle those who thought the tabloid-soaked case was resolved, but the palazzo of Italian justice has many rooms, and the Corte Suprema di Cassazione—Italy’s highest court—is expected to reinstate the conviction and make Knox a fugitive from justice.

The case captured global attention in 2007. And why not? It had an international cast and a lurid theory about a pretty villain who murdered an equally pretty victim the night after Halloween, in what the prosecutor initially described as an occult sex game gone wrong. The case was

ratings gold for American television and sheer delight for Britain's notorious tabloids, as well as Italian papers that saw the case as an example of American arrogance and depravity.



Amanda Knox, the American student at the center of an Italian murder trial which made headlines worldwide, was acquitted of the charges in 2011 and traveled back to the US. Now the Italian courts may want her back in prison. Credit: Patrick Kehoe/The Guardian/Sipa

Meredith Kercher, 21, a British national on her junior year abroad and studying at the University of Perugia, died of a knife wound to the throat and was left half-naked in her locked bedroom in a stone cottage that sits beside the historic Perugia centro, with its famed Etruscan arch and

medieval churches rich with the works of medieval and Renaissance masters. The following morning, Knox, one of three women who shared the apartment with Kercher, was first on the scene. She says she had come home after spending the night at her boyfriend's house.

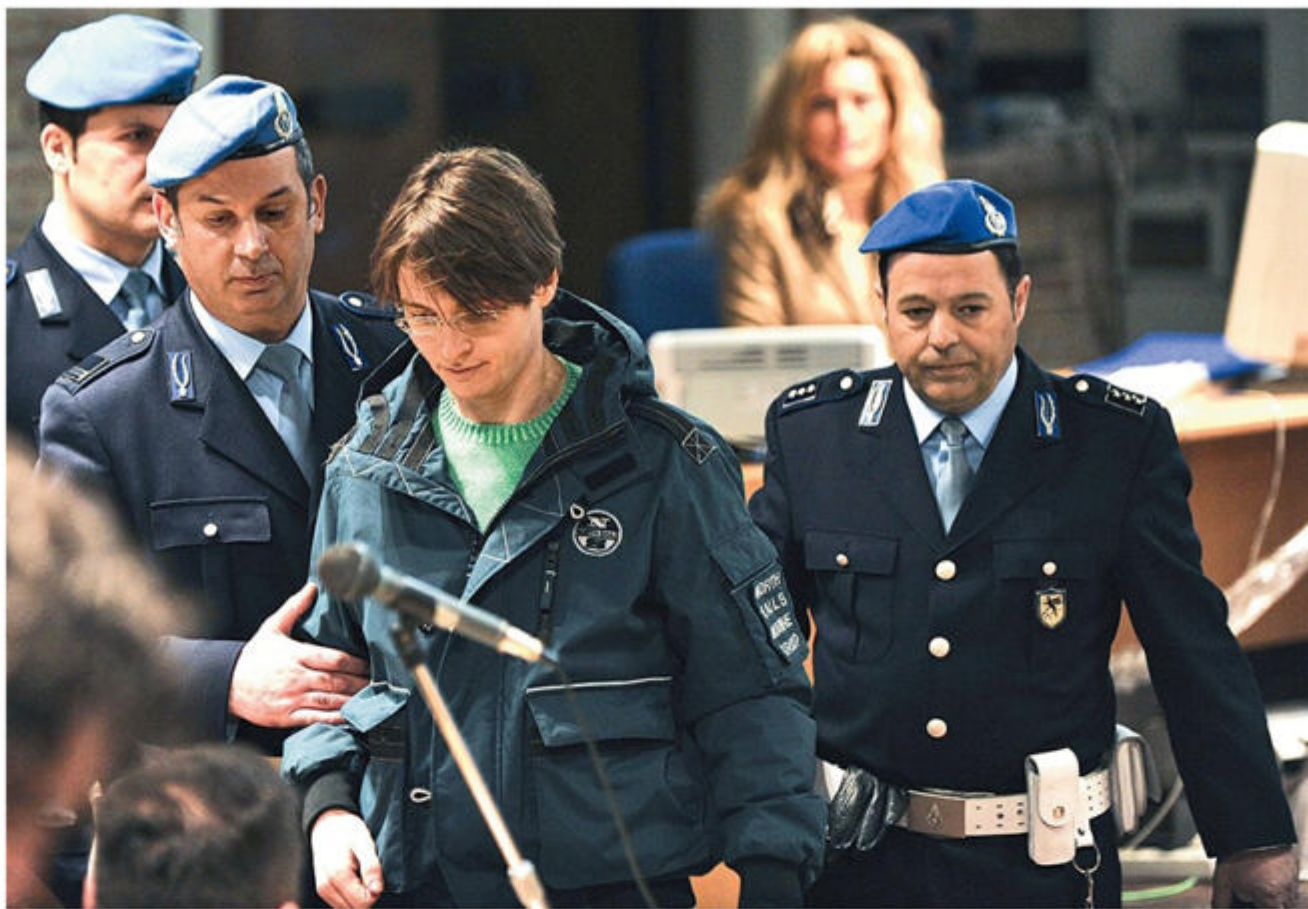
Four days later, police arrested Knox, then 20, after interrogating her all night and producing two statements she'd signed, admitting that she had been inside the house when Kercher was killed. They also arrested her Italian boyfriend of about two weeks, Raffaele Sollecito, 23, as well as a 38-year-old local bar owner and musician from Congo named Patrick Lumumba. Law enforcement announced that the three had together killed Kercher. The Perugia perp walk ended without much information, so the press corps went straight to social media, where they turned up a trove of material—including Knox's MySpace nickname, "Foxy Knoxy," as well as pictures of Kercher, the victim, in a vampire costume with fake blood drizzled on her chin, and of Sollecito in a Halloween costume: a mad doctor wielding a cleaver. A few weeks later, police released Lumumba, who had an alibi, and arrested another African-Italian, Rudy Guede, then 21, whose fingerprints and DNA were the only ones in the murder room. The police and prosecution selectively leaked evidence to the press.

I arrived in Italy in 2009, expecting to write a book about why this American college girl who looked like a J. Crew model had gone Charlie Manson in one of the cradles of Renaissance art. After a month of walking up and down the vertiginous lanes and piazzas of the city, interviewing lawyers, police and witnesses, I had learned that numerous "facts" reported in the press about the case—blood-smeared bathroom walls, a crime scene scrubbed with bleach, students caught with a bucket and mop—weren't in the court record. Foxy Knoxy's "confession" didn't look like a confession when read in its entirety. No matter: The story was rapidly unfolding in ever more titillating ways. Perugia

authorities leaked Knox's supposedly sex-drenched jailhouse journal, which was actually filled with accounts of her being afraid of being raped by a menacing guard.

During my 10 months in Perugia, in many sessions with Perugia prosecutor Giuliano Mignini in his office stocked with sinus medicine, toy models of carabinieri in uniform and portraits of Italian prosecutors murdered by the Mafia, we discussed his theory of the crime, which shifted in terms of motive—sometimes robbery, sometimes female jealousy, sometimes just depraved sex. I also conducted dozens of interviews with other lawyers involved in the case; communicated with the defendants; interviewed their families and friends; and, with a team of researchers, examined court records and police witness statements. In the end, I concluded that the case against Knox was built on bad police work and bias—legal, personal, gender and national. I believe that every item of circumstantial evidence against the students can be explained by the predictable confusion of a naïf in a country whose laws and social mores she didn't understand, being grilled by cops in a language she spoke poorly. There was bad police work and prosecutorial haste in a small town under intense media pressure, and the prosecutor blamed Knox while ignoring other, more plausible suspects. I wrote in my book that the conviction of Amanda Knox was a miscarriage of justice.

If the Italian court reinstates her conviction, the case will be transformed from a sex-murder scandal into a diplomatic showdown between the United States and Italy. Given the stakes now, one might assume the Italian court has a solid basis for throwing out the lower court ruling—some startling new piece of evidence. It does not.



Raffaele Sollecito is led by police to attend his trial in Perugia, February 13, 2009. Sollecito and Knox had only been dating for a short time before the murder of Kercher. Credit: Daniele La Monaca/Reuters

A Blood-Smeared Bath Mat

To understand this twisted and endlessly twisting tale, one must begin with Perugia, a walled mountain town in Umbria that has been inhabited for 3,000 years and is home to some of the greatest works of art and architecture in Western civilization, including masterpieces by Perugino, Giotto and Raphael. Culturally sophisticated, it is also remote and provincial. From the moment the prosecutor looked down upon the bloody corpse of Kercher Kercher, the case was steeped in small town rumor, local lore, esoteric ideas and religious symbols. Italian newspapers speculated that the case was connected to the Masons, the once-powerful secret society linked to the mysterious Knights Templar, an ascetic order that resided in Perugia in 1400s. Today there are more Masons per capita in Perugia than in any other Italian city.

The walled city's current inhabitants feel under siege by immigrants and criminals. Moroccan and Albanian

gangs roam its streets and settle their disputes with knives; international syndicates ship heroin intended for Rome through its train station; prostitutes in miniskirts and thigh-high boots peddle their services on the streets of the industrial sprawl on the flats below the hilltop town.

No one was more imbued with the local lore and alarmed by the twin sieges than Mignini, a lifelong Perugino, who saw at the bloody crime scene ominous signs of a deviant ritual cult. He told me he knew from the beginning that the culprit was almost certainly a foreigner. He also suspected that another, never-apprehended person was on the scene, orchestrating the action, like a malign master of ceremonies.

A devout Catholic known to have consulted a religious psychic for a previous case, Mignini was on the lookout for the uncanny, and in the Knox case he found it: from the day of the murder (All Saints' Day, when Italians visit cemeteries and lay flowers on family plots) to Amanda Knox herself, a light-eyed stranger who could have been the real-life model for Perugia's Madonna delle Grazie, a large, 15th-century painting before which generations of Perugians had genuflected, showering it with symbolic votive offerings. A poster of the town's Madonna hung behind the desk in the prosecutor's office.



Knox and her former Italian boyfriend were at the center of a tabloid frenzy which painted the pair as a drug-fueled, sex-crazed couple which lured Kercher to join them before turning violent against her. Credit: Justin

Sutcliffe/eyevine/Redux

The bewitching doppelgänger of that Madonna, Knox was born, and grew up in a broken family, in a section of suburban Seattle populated by immigrants, mega-churches and check-cashing storefronts. A good student with a knack for languages, she paid her way for a semester studying Italian at the Università per Stranieri (University for Foreigners) in Perugia during her junior year at the University of Washington. Friends described her as no more of a party animal than the average college kid, a girl who smoked a little weed, a naive, free-spirited hippie chick who liked camping.

After arriving first on the scene the morning Kercher's body was found, Knox was in the house for several hours before she called police. She has consistently maintained that she had spent the night at her boyfriend's house, which was a short walk away, and returned in the morning to shower. She says the outside door of the house was unlocked. Inside, she saw Kercher's door locked and noticed

a blood-smeared bath mat in the bathroom, but took a shower anyway. She then returned to her boyfriend's home, bringing him back to the house an hour later. That's when they noticed a broken window in one of the four bedrooms and called the police.

At the police station that evening, where Knox and Kercher's other two roommates gathered with some of the victim's friends, some noted that Knox didn't cry.

Unlike her Knox's Italian roommates, who brought lawyers with them to the police station in the hours after the body was discovered, Knox and Sollecito repeatedly returned to the police station for questioning without lawyers. She never asked for a lawyer, never contacted the American Embassy and told her mother she was cooperating so readily because she thought the cops needed her help. She didn't know, of course, that the police were already tapping her phone and that of her boyfriend.

Police were almost immediately suspicious of the boisterous American. She nuzzled with her boyfriend in the garden as police examined the crime scene indoors—an image Italian television captured and re-looped for broadcasting endlessly in the months to come. She did yoga stretches in the police waiting room, and Kercher's British friends said she never seemed to really grieve over Kercher's brutal death.

The police called Knox in for what she thought was help four days in a row. On the fourth, the police questioned her throughout the night. In the morning, they emerged with a signed, typed statement in which Knox said she thought she'd been in the house while Kercher was being murdered; she'd heard her roommate screaming and said a well-liked local musician and bar owner, Patrick Lumumba, was in Kercher's room with her.

Perugia police conducted the interrogation that produced that confession in a room set up for audio and video recording, but never produced any recording of this

marathon session with Knox, rendering the statement inadmissible in the trial court (although the high court ordered the appellate judges to consider it anyway). Knox claims police threatened her that night with 30 years in prison, insisted they knew she'd been inside the house and hit her to get her to say she was there with Lumumba. The police were fixated on Lumumba because he was the last person Knox texted the night of the murder, typing the Italian version of "see you later"—a common sign-off in English but one the Italian police took to mean that they'd get together later that night: to murder Kercher.



Members of the court inspect the scene of the murder in Perugia, Italy, April 18, 2009. Credit: Daniele La Monaca/Reuters

A friendly female translator working for the police also encouraged her to confess, explaining that when traumatic things happen, memories fail. After she was arrested, Knox wrote in a notebook that she wasn't sure of the memory described in her signed statement, but she did not officially retract her claim that Lumumba had been in the house. She might have had a very good reason to doubt her memory of that night: She and her boyfriend had been smoking hash

daily, spending the seven days and nights before the crime in a fog of cannabis.

The Italian Supreme Court ruled that Knox's confession could not be used in the trial, but it hung over her head from that day on because in Italy, civil cases filed against criminal defendants by victims run concurrent with criminal cases, and that confession would be admissible in the civil proceedings. In Perugia, the statement was almost universally seen as definitive proof of Knox's guilt. And legal experts say a confession, even a bogus, coerced one, permanently taints a trial and damns a defendant. "Everything changes after the confession, from interpretation to evidence to lay witnesses," says Saul Kassin, a John Jay College criminologist and expert in false confessions and their effects.

Other than this suspect confession, the police had little evidence against Knox. No scientifically credible physical evidence puts Knox or her boyfriend in the murder room. Contrast that to Guede, the African-Italian who fled to Germany a day after the murder. His fingerprints and DNA were found in the room and his DNA in Kercher's body.

In a desperate attempt to explain the lack of fingerprints or DNA in the murder room, investigators posited that the students had wiped them away, miraculously leaving only Guede's prints and DNA. When it came time to identify the murder weapon, one of the police officers plucked a large kitchen knife out of a drawer of knives at Sollecito's house, selecting it, he testified, based on "instinct." That knife remained for six days in a shoebox at an officer's home, highly uncommon practice for evidence. But weeks later, police forensic investigators declared they had found the victim's DNA on it. Independent experts later determined that the organic material the police had found on the knife was from a potato.

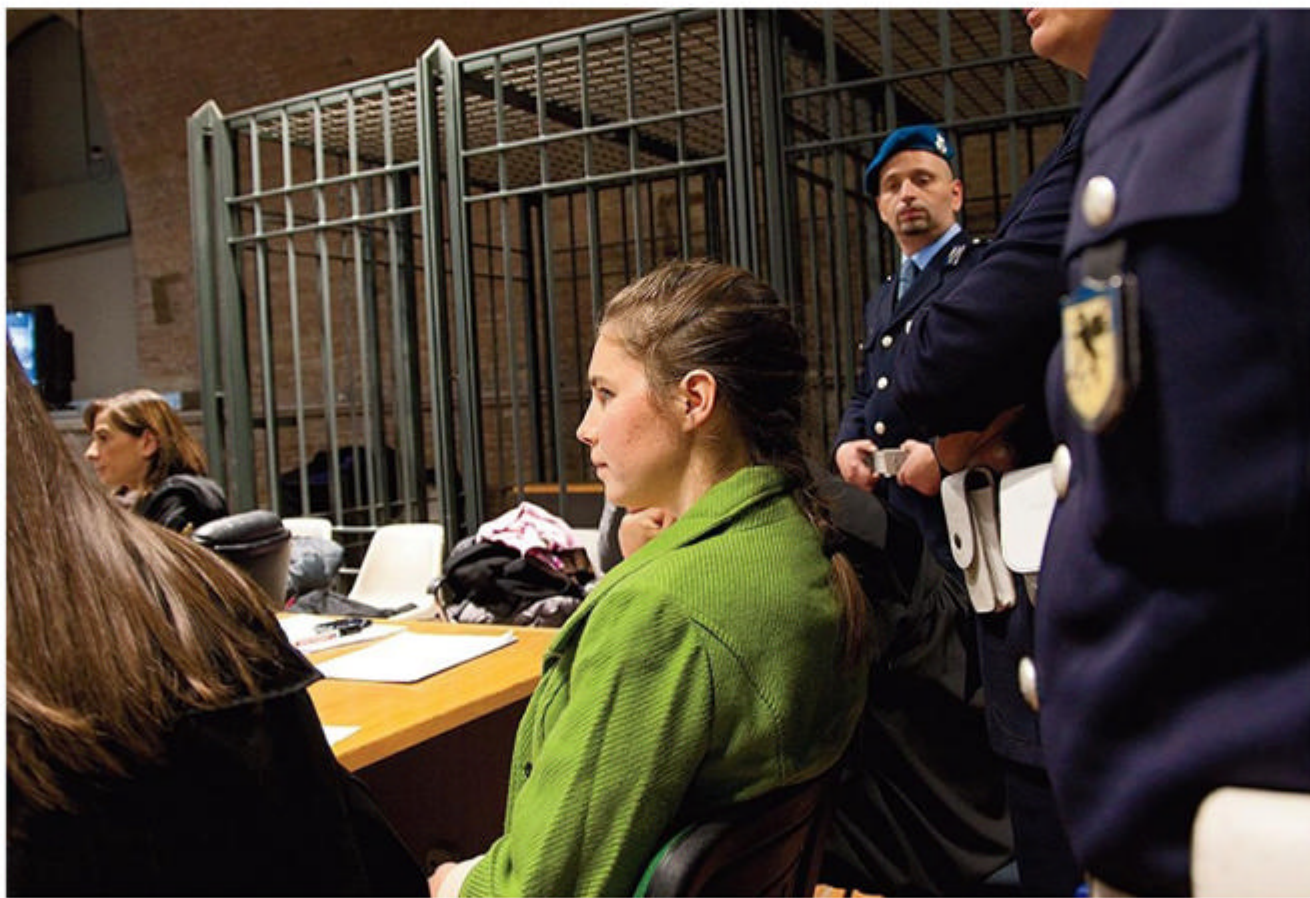


Sollecito arrives at a news conference in Rome, July 1, 2014. Throughout the trial he maintained her innocence but during the press conference he distanced himself, saying the two had not been together for the whole evening when the crime took place. Sollecito, convicted alongside Knox of the murder in 2009 and cleared on appeal four years later, was re-convicted in January 2014 after a retrial and sentenced to 25 years in prison. Credit: Remo Casilli/Reuters

Equally embarrassing for police investigators was their sneaker evidence. Police jailed Sollecito because he owned

a pair of Nikes that seemed to match a bloody shoe-print in the house. When defense investigators proved the shoe-print belonged to Nikes similar to a pair owned by Guede, the police rushed back to the crime scene—six weeks after the murder—and emerged with a tiny clasp cut from Kercher’s bra by the killer, on which the scientific police later said they found Sollecito’s DNA.

As laughably inept as all this police work was, the most bizarre aspect of the government’s case was the prosecutor’s theory explaining a smashed bedroom window: He said Knox and Sollecito had “staged” a burglary in a back room of the apartment by throwing a large rock at the window...from inside the room. But Guede, the man whose DNA and prints were found in and around Kercher, and in her empty purse, was a burglar who had, in the weeks prior to the murder, committed at least three break-ins.



During the trial, Knox maintained her innocence and recalled the story of finding Kercher body in their apartment after she had already been murdered. Credit: Max Rossi/Reuters

A Dickensian Twist of the Knife

With so much salacious gossip about Knox to feast on, the press mostly ignored Guede. They dismissed him as “a drifter” or drug dealer railroaded into jail in a special *giudizio abbreviato*—fast trial—without competent legal aid. He left Italy the day after the murder and spent several weeks hiding in Germany, sleeping in refugee shelters. German police arrested him when he hopped a train without a ticket and soon sent him back to Italy. He opted for a bench trial and was represented by one of Perugia’s busiest criminal defense lawyers, Valter Biscotti, who took the case *pro bono*.

Biscotti had made a good living in Perugia representing local drug gangsters. Thanks to Biscotti’s experience and deep connections with police and magistrates, Guede was arguably better represented than Knox was. Her legal team included a garrulous, aging local soccer star and a corporate lawyer from Rome—the latter selected by the Knox family because someone in his office spoke good English when they cold-called from Seattle in a panic after her arrest.

Born in the Ivory Coast, Guede arrived in Italy as a 5-year-old, with just his father. The single dad worked as a bricklayer and routinely left the boy alone, sometimes locked in a bathroom, until one of the child’s teachers took pity on him, bought him clothes, mothered him and even made sure he made communion. By the time he was a teenager, Guede was as Italian as any Perugian, except that his brown skin and birth meant that under Italian law he was not a citizen but merely a “guest.”

His difficult childhood took a Dickensian twist when the children of one of the richest families in Perugia, having met the teenage Guede on the basketball court, begged their father to take him in. For several years, the son of a bricklayer got a taste of European posh, vacationing in London and Sardinia. The family took Guede’s education seriously, even springing for tutors, but when the patriarch discovered Guede was lying about keeping up with his

studies, he cast him out of the family. When Guede was arrested for Kercher's murder, he was living in a small apartment reputedly paid for by the matriarch, who felt sorry for him.



Kercher had attended a Halloween party two days before she was found dead on November 2, 2007. The image would be used by some court watchers to back up their belief that the young students were involved in sex games that went too far and resulted in death. Credit: Archivio GBB/Contrasto/Redux

In the months before the murder, Guede seemed to be having profound psychological problems. Late at night, according to a student and friend of Guede's who spent the summer before the murder with him, he would go into fugue states and find himself miles from his bed, not knowing how he got there. His friend said Guede often preferred to sleep on the floor at his friend's apartment, where he would wake in the middle of the night and take on different personae—such as a dog or a professor.

In the two months before the murder, Guede on three occasions known to the Perugia police had broken into what he thought were empty dwellings—sometimes eating,

turning up the heat and resting before making off with items from these homes or offices. A week before the murder, he was arrested with stolen goods in his backpack, having broken into a nursery school in Milan, hundreds of miles to the north, where he had lived for a time. The Milan nursery school proprietor who found him sitting at her desk on a Saturday morning had no idea how he got inside, but she recalled he was calm and untroubled when she called the police. The items included a computer lifted from a law office in Perugia a few weeks before by someone who had climbed in a second-floor window, turned up the heat, drunk a soda from the fridge and rearranged bits of broken glass into neat little piles. The week before, someone had broken in and cooked pasta in the kitchen, leaving small bowls around the children's cots.

The Milan police grilled Guede for several hours about the nursery school break-in, then called Perugia police and released him. One of the many mysteries of this case is why Perugia police apparently told the Milan police to let him go. He took a train back to Perugia, and a week later Kercher was dead.

Guede has never denied being in Kercher's room that night, and says he watched her bleed to death. He says that she invited him in earlier that night and that he was in the bathroom when he heard her screams. The facts are these: Kercher returned to her house after having dinner with friends, shortly before 9 p.m. The malfunctioning door to the cottage would stay closed against the sharp November wind only if locked with a key from the inside. This she presumably did, locking herself in with her killer. Her keys were never found.

What happened once she was inside is the central confounding mystery here. Guede's DNA was found in feces in an unflushed toilet not far from her room, leading some to theorize that she surprised him as he relaxed on the toilet, perhaps in another of his fugue states. The next morning

her two cellphones were found in a private garden down the hill from her house. Guede's fingerprints were found in an empty purse on her bed, and his DNA—but not semen—was found in her vagina.

Guede's first known comments on the case came in a police-monitored Skype conversation with a Perugia pal while he was still in Germany, in which he said that Knox had “nothing to do with it.” By the time Guede stood before an appeals judge two years later, trying to get his sentence reduced, his story had changed: He said he heard Knox arguing with Kercher over money the night of the murder. “She orchestrated it all,” his lawyer said of Knox, “for sex.” Guede's prison sentence was halved after that appearance; while Knox and Sollecito were sentenced to 26 and 25 years in prison, respectively, Guede's sentence was cut to 16 years.



Rudy Guede is escorted from the courthouse at the end of his appeal trial, December 21, 2009. Guede was sentenced to 30 years in jail in October 2008, which was later shortened to 16 after he gave testimony that placed Knox at the scene of the murder. Credit: Alessandro Bianchi/Reuters

Paparazzi and PTSD

In October 2011, an appeals judge threw out those convictions, and Knox immediately booked a flight home, to real-time media coverage reminiscent of that for O.J. Simpson's white Bronco ride. CNN broadcast live footage of her British Airways flight touching down in Seattle. The American media treated her like a baby rescued from the bottom of a well, a heartwarming story of a rescued girl. This angered many people in Italy, still convinced that a spoiled and depraved murderer had slipped from their grasp. In the U.K., years of tabloid coverage bolstered a widespread belief that a callous and cruel American had killed a lovely English girl.

The appeals judge, Pratillo Hellmann, had considered the testimony of independent experts who contradicted the scientific police on the DNA. He dismissed the unrecorded "confession" and stressed the fundamental illogic of the theory that even though the fingerprints and DNA of a known burglar were at the crime scene, it must have been a "staged" burglary scene, not allowing for the possibility that an actual burglary was committed that night. He wrote that he believed Guede was the "single agent" of the crime.

Hellmann's ruling cost him. He had been in line to be chief magistrate in Perugia but was savaged for his decision and retired. The chief high court prosecutor suggested Hellmann was delusional. The judge, he complained, had "lost the plot."

The prosecution appealed, and a year later the Supreme Court overturned Hellmann's decision and sent the case back to an appeals court, in Florence. At that point, it was fairly clear that no matter what any lower appeals court ruled, future appeals to the Supreme Court would be futile. And

indeed, a Florence appellate court upheld the trial conviction last summer. The defense's appeal of that decision will be ruled upon this month, but it's seen as pro forma at best because the same court ruled a year ago against an acquittal.

Since 2011, Knox has been home. She wrote a book for a reported \$4 million advance, broke her years-long silence with ABC News's Diane Sawyer, moved to Brooklyn, returned to Seattle, started freelance writing and got engaged. Paparazzi still occasionally stalk her. According to a friend, she regularly sees a therapist for PTSD. Sollecito, too, left Italy for a while, writing his own book about the case and traveling around America (even dropping in at the Burning Man festival a few years ago) before returning to Italy, just in time to have authorities seize his passport after the appellate court reinstated the conviction. At that point, after providing an alibi for Knox for five years, Sollecito now says he doesn't know if she stayed in his house all night or not.

Sollecito's waffling on this point is the only bit of evidence that has changed since the conviction. To believe that he and Knox are guilty, one must still believe that although a known burglar's DNA and fingerprints are the only material evidence of anyone other than the victim in the murder room, the students staged a burglary to cover up their participation in what the prosecutor suggested was a sex murder.

The implausibility of the prosecution's scenario is shocking from the outside but is acceptable in the Italian legal system, where the narrative is more important than the details, and cultural norms often favor conspiracy theories over simpler explanations. Unlike the Anglo-Saxon system, which is adversarial, the Italian system is inquisitorial (with roots in ancient Rome, the medieval Papal States and then Fascist Italy). Under this system, prosecutors are not required to convince judges and jurors "beyond a reasonable doubt."

That River of Blood

It would be grossly unfair to suggest all Italians supported this modern-day burning of the American witch, but observers who had a sense that an injustice was being done could do little, and few dared speak out. One reason is that in Italy, it is a crime to “insult” public officials or damage the reputation of a magistrate. In the Knox case, the police and prosecution filed numerous slander suits against groups and individuals, including journalists and the Knox and Sollecito families.

The police also arrested local blogger and journalist Frank Sfarzo, who said they roughed him up. Under the honor and slander laws, the prosecutor charged Sfarzo and at least three publications or journalists who have challenged the law enforcement version of the story. Prosecutor Mignini had an Italian journalist thrown in jail for investigating his conclusions in another case—leading an American writer covering that story to flee Italy for fear he’d be arrested.

Italian journalists and foreign reporters working in Italy heed these laws, which is why an annual ranking of press freedom by nation puts Italy in the “partly free” category (along with Mali and Algeria)—the only Western European country to fall into that category.



Knox and Kercher shared a room in a Perugia, Italy, while studying abroad. Credit: Alessandro Imbriaco - Fabio Seve/Contrasto/Redux

In Italy, I covered the story as I would have at home, asking questions and following leads where they led. What most astonished me about the case, as an occasional member of the media pack, was the lack of curiosity about Guede. The Kerchers have claimed that the media were far more interested in Knox than anyone else in the case—including the man who testified in open court that he sat with Kercher as she died, never called police for help and was still unable, he later recalled, to get the sight of the river of her blood out of his mind.

That was as close to a real confession in open court as the case ever got.

When the Corte Suprema di Cassazione upholds the trial conviction, which seems inevitable, Raffaele Sollecito will likely be taken to prison. Guede, still serving his prison sentence, could be released in a few years. The big question

is whether the Italians will formally request the U.S. to extradite Knox.

Under the rule of Italian criminal procedure, the chief appellate prosecutor in Florence—the venue of the last appeal—will have the option of asking the minister of justice to make that request. (The minister, Andrea Orlando, is a political appointee of Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi.) If he makes that request, the State Department must respond, and the Knox story will become a Washington, D.C., story. If State approves it, the request goes to the Department of Justice, which in turn sends a request to the U.S. attorney in whatever district Knox resides in. That U.S. attorney would file a complaint and arrest her, then ship her back to Italy.

Knox's best chance for avoiding extradition would be to convince the State Department to rebuff the Italian minister of justice. Knox now has some of the best legal defense in the nation: She is represented by Washington lawyer Bob Barnett, who has represented President Bill Clinton, among other luminaries. Barnett has instructed the Knox family not to speak about this matter, and he declined to comment to Newsweek.

A State Department source tells Newsweek that diplomats in both Italy and the U.S. expect an extradition request to be denied: "I don't think either Italy or the U.S. wants a major burr under our saddle in terms of relationships between our countries, and this would be that, if the Italians pushed it." If they do, the source adds, there "is not any way" the U.S. will arrest Knox, nor will it have her declared a fugitive.

The elected Italian government in Rome is separate from the judiciary, and traditionally the two branches do not have warm relations. "I know the Italian government was rolling its eyes" over the prospect of the case reaching this phase, the State Department source says, adding that Rome faces "a real political problem" if the judiciary requests extradition.

The American diplomat predicts the Italian court won't ask to extradite.

One member of the judiciary who agrees with the Americans that the case doesn't stand up to scrutiny is former Perugia appellate Judge Pratillo Hellmann, who overturned the conviction. In an interview with Newsweek, he called the investigation "scarily amateurish," adding, "The problems with the scientific evidence all come from the same source. They do not know how to conduct investigations. The prosecutor doesn't, and in this specific case, nor do the police."

Hellmann blames self-protection among the fraternity of magistrates (the civic category to which both judges and prosecutors belong) for the current conundrum. "It was simpler and more useful career-wise to convict them," he says of his fellow judges. "You need to be within the system to understand. The magistratura is a sect. I never really got involved with the politics within it. I was just the kind of judge who did his work and that's it. Inside the system, there are parties, and if you are not part of one of them, you are out of the game."

Asked whether he thinks bias played a role in the case, Hellmann says, "Absolutely! It is striking how biased it was." He adds that Italy's Supreme Court put itself in a bind when it ordered the trial not to consider Knox's allegedly coerced confession but then ordered the appellate courts to consider it. "That is quite a frittata," he says. "They are contradicting themselves."

Whatever Italy's top judges decide on March 25, one thing is certain: The extraordinary feats of logical contortion already achieved in nearly eight years of litigation in the caso Kercher might still be surpassed.

Reported in Italy by Giulia Alagna.



Pablo Blazquez Dominguez/Getty

IS PABLO IGLESIAS SPAIN'S BARACK OBAMA OR ITS VLADIMIR LENIN?

PABLO IGLESIAS IS ON A MISSION TO SAVE SPAIN.

In 2008, when the global economy cratered, Lola Sánchez Caldentey lost her job teaching at a public school in her native Murcia, a small city in southeastern Spain. She also lost her faith in the future. She was 28 years old.

With unemployment in the country at Weimar Republic levels, Sánchez had unwillingly joined Spain's "lost generation"—smart, educated 20-somethings with sad prospects for a decent job. Like many of her peers, she decided she had no choice but to leave the country, traveling first to Iceland, where she taught Spanish, and then Scotland, where she found work as a waitress. She even tried the United States, waiting tables at a Mexican restaurant. After each stint abroad, she came home in search of a better job, to no avail. "I couldn't have a family, buy a house, buy a car," she says. "This crisis hasn't let me go on with my life."

Last spring, Sánchez was listening to a radio program when she heard an interview with Pablo Iglesias Turrión, a ponytailed political science professor who—along with other faculty members at Complutense University in Madrid—had launched a new political party. They called it Podemos ("We can"), and promised to defibrillate the flatlining Spanish economy and radically remake the government. Hearing the professor revived hopes Sánchez had all but abandoned.

Iglesias, 36, was inspiring people across Spain, especially among the country's opportunity-deprived youth. He urged his burgeoning flock to form political *circulos* (circles)—tightly knit activist networks that could broaden his movement and mobilize voters. These networks created a powerful base, and even as the party grew in size and sophistication, its members felt as if they had a say. The *circulos* galvanized frustrated Spaniards in an unprecedented way. In 2011, tens of thousands took to the streets in protests against corruption, joblessness and big cuts in public services. But just as Occupy Wall Street fizzled in the U.S., these *Indignados* failed to transform their anger into something more substantial. For Sánchez and many others, Podemos was a new reason to believe. "I felt like this was the time to join something to change Spain," she said. "Not just for my generation, but for the future."



Lola Sanchez checks her phone at the Citizen convention of Podemos party in Madrid on October 19, 2014 Credit: Jose Luis Cuesta/Cordon Press/Corbis

Propelled by the same grassroots fervor that carried Barack Obama to the White House in 2008, Sánchez started a círculo in Murcia. The group began as just a few people

meeting for coffee, but before long it grew, and this out-of-work teacher became a local leader. Last spring, members of her circle encouraged her to run for office, and she agreed. In May 2014, Sánchez won a seat in the European Parliament, along with four other members of Podemos (including Iglesias, the party's general secretary). The victories were stunning. Six months before, Podemos didn't even exist. Now this group of upstarts had garnered 1.2 million votes, 8 percent of the total turnout. "It was a huge surprise," Sánchez told me in a telephone interview last month. "In the morning I was a waitress. By nightfall, I was a member of parliament."

The Next Mini-Revolution

Spain's economy has barely begun to recover from the recession. Economic growth resumed here only last year, the unemployment rate remains at 23 percent (the second highest in Europe, behind Greece), and the national debt is at \$1.2 trillion, a level most economists say is dangerous and unsustainable. So it's of little surprise that Podemos is surging. Recent polls indicate the party is now Spain's most popular political force. In January, 100,000 of its supporters gathered in Madrid for the country's largest anti-austerity demonstration in years. If national elections were held today, polls say Iglesias would become the nation's next prime minister.

Two years ago, his rise would have been unthinkable—like a Ron Paul presidency in the U.S. Spain's two largest political groups—the governing (and conservative) People's Party and the Socialists—seemed to have a lock on power, and few predicted this sudden upheaval. In hindsight it makes sense, especially after January's surprise victory by Greece's populist Syriza party. Populism is in vogue throughout Europe, thanks in part to economies that have failed to help many of those who need it most.

Podemos is positioned to spark the continent's next mini-revolution, and its leaders have some bold economic

proposals. Among them: raising the minimum wage, creating a maximum wage, lowering the retirement age, implementing a 35-hour workweek, ending tax havens and E.U. border controls, nationalizing utilities and banks bailed out by public funds after the crisis and even a proposal to ban layoffs for companies turning a profit. None of the party's top officials agreed to speak to Newsweek for this article, but in public forums they've made their agenda clear. They want to organize the country's left, wrench power from the political class and redistribute Spain's wealth to the masses.



Greek opposition leader and head of radical leftist Syriza party, Alexis Tsipras (L) and Spanish Podemos party Secretary General Pablo Iglesias wave to supporters following a campaign rally in central Athens, January 22, 2015. Credit: Yannis Behrakis/Reuters

There's nothing new about these ideas, and for the most part they should be easy for Spain's left to rally around. Iglesias is a young, gifted orator, and the whole ponytail, scruffy beard thing makes him seem like the type of guy you'd want to have a beer with. In speeches and interviews, he comes across as a genuine outsider, the kind of politician who had no choice but to abandon the comforts of his

academic chair and take his country back from its corrupt overlords.

Yet some liberals are suspicious of Iglesias and his party. They worry Podemos's ties to the socialist government in Venezuela belie an authoritarian streak. In recent months, Iglesias has attempted to broaden his appeal, and some in his base have begun to suspect that his true motive is less about the power to change and more about power for its own sake. The party's success may depend on its ability to close the distance between its base of Indignados, who favor grassroots decision making, and more mainstream populists who prefer a more centralized, change-from-within approach. "Supporters of Podemos are mainly disaffected citizens who distrust political parties and institutions," Guillermo Cordero Garcia, a political science professor at the University of Pompeu Fabra in Barcelona, told me last month. "This fact makes them skeptical about even Podemos."

Sánchez dismisses her party's critics. Podemos is real, she says, and soon people will see that this is not a party of empty promises. "We are only common people doing extraordinary things," she told me. "We did all of this with our own money, euro by euro."



Demonstrators shout slogans as they hold flags, placards and a banner during the "March for Change" planned by left-wing party Podemos that emerged out of the "Indignants" movement, in Madrid on January 31, 2015. Tens of thousands of people took to the streets in Madrid today in support of a call for change from new anti-austerity party Podemos, a week after Greece elected its ally Syriza. Credit: Gerard Julien/AFP/Getty

A Tattoo of Defeat

Born in Madrid in 1978, Pablo Iglesias Turrión was named after Pablo Iglesias Posse, the 19th century father of Spanish socialism. His mother was a trade union lawyer, his father a labor inspector and history professor. Iglesias has been active in politics since he was a teenager, when he joined Spain's Communist Youth Union. He earned degrees in law and political science, and holds a master's degree in communication from the European Graduate School in Switzerland, where he studied political theory, cinema and psychoanalysis.

But Iglesias is no ordinary academic. For years he's moderated two political talk shows, which is why he's very comfortable in front of a camera. He's also comfortable playing the underdog. "I have defeat tattooed on my DNA," he said in a debate last year. "My great-uncle was shot dead. My grandfather was given the death sentence and spent five

years in jail. My grandmothers suffered the humiliation of those defeated in the [Spanish] Civil War. My father was put in jail. My mother was politically active in the underground.”

His narrative is that of humble teacher turned reluctant pol. In reality, Iglesias is a savvy, calculating leader who has spent years plotting. Podemos’s *circulos* are a case study in how to build grassroots support, and the party’s focus on Spain’s corrupt elite is textbook populism.



Pablo Iglesias, leader of Spanish Podemos (We Can) left-wing, party smiles and claps after giving a speech to his supporters gathering at the main square of Madrid during a Podemos (We Can) party march in Madrid, Spain, January 31, 2015. Tens of thousands of people, possibly more, are marching through Madrid’s streets in a powerful show of strength by Spain’s fledgling radical leftist party Podemos (We Can) which hopes to emulate the electoral success of Greece’s Syriza party in elections later this year. Credit: Daniel Ochoa de Olza/AP

So far, his strategy seems to be working. Voters often use European parliamentary elections as a way to express frustration, and its legislators don’t have much real influence in governing a country like Spain. Still, last May was a huge victory for Podemos: The day after its electoral earthquake, Socialist leader Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba announced he

would step down from his party's leadership post. A week later, King Juan Carlos agreed to abdicate his throne.

A Charming Demagogue?

Iglesias and his supporters have eight months before they get a crack at the Spanish parliament, and there's a sizable contingent of skeptics to convert. Berni Vila Pou is the second person I spoke to about Podemos after moving to Barcelona in January. (The first was my yoga teacher, who couldn't remember Iglesias's name; she called him "the long-haired guy.") Vila is 25 and works at a bank. He leans left and agrees with much of the Podemos platform, but won't vote for the party this fall. Over a couple of Tinto de veranos on a recent evening, I grilled him about why. Vila is a native Catalan, and like many from this part of eastern Spain, he wants Catalonia to become independent. Part of what he doesn't like about Podemos and Iglesias is that they've waffled over secession.

Yet Vila and others I spoke with—both in Catalonia and elsewhere around the country—insist their biggest problem with Podemos is the people behind the party. Many on the Spanish left say Iglesias and company are too vague about how they will pay for their programs and accomplish their agenda—especially when it comes to the country's huge debt. In a speech last month, Mariano Rajoy, the country's prime minister, warned that Podemos offers only "confusion, quirky ideas and internal fighting," and advised Spaniards not to "gamble away our children's future on a Russian roulette of frivolity, incompetence and populism."



Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez speaks at the presidential palace in Caracas, with his daughter Maria in the background on May 29, 2010. Credit: Ben Speck/Getty

Another complaint I regularly hear among voters struck me as paradoxical: Many say they don't trust Iglesias because they find him too concerned with power. Iglesias's strategy, some say, reminds people here of another populist, a man to whom Podemos has close ties: Venezuela's late president Hugo Chávez.

The party's main connection to Venezuela is ideological. Podemos was inspired by the political philosophy of Ernesto LaClau, a post-Marxist theorist. LaClau argued that class rule is best achieved by gradually gaining influence in society (by getting elected to political office) and by identifying a clear enemy, the ruling class. If you listen to Iglesias speak, it's often about *la casta*. And like Podemos, Chávez gained traction by organizing small grassroots associations. Once elected, he redirected the country's oil proceeds to a bevy of government-administered social programs, a popular move among the country's long-neglected poor. But he also grew increasingly authoritarian, which is perhaps why some on the Spanish left found it

disturbing that Iglesias once called Venezuela “one of the healthiest democracies in the world.”

Podemos’s ties to Venezuela aren’t just ideological; they’re financial. All three of the party’s founders—Iglesias, Juan Carlos Monedero and Iñigo Errejón—worked as advisers to the Chávez government.

‘The Problem Is You’

The party’s critical challenge, observers say, lies in its transition from an Occupy-style grassroots movement to an organized political party. That evolution requires some hierarchy, and a streamlined strategy. Podemos makes its decisions with the input of the *circulos*, but has in recent months shifted more power to a group it calls the coordination council, whose members are chosen by Iglesias. The purpose, political observers say, is to make sure the party’s message is carefully controlled so it doesn’t alienate voters.

Another step the party took toward becoming more inclusive came last month, when Podemos began courting the business community, briefing banks and other companies on its economic policies. Industry honchos haven’t been receptive, but the outreach suggests Iglesias isn’t purely an ideologue.

Pragmatism appears to have long been part of Iglesias’s philosophy. At the beginning of the *Indignados*, he spoke to his students about their frustration in discussing politics with their peers who hadn’t read Lenin and Marx. The professor urged his students to reconsider their goals. “Can’t you see that the problem is you?” he said in a debate last year. “That

politics has nothing to do with being right, that politics is about succeeding?”

Political success, Iglesias argued, is about connecting your ideals with what the majority wants, which “implies riding out contradictions.” To illustrate his point, he invoked Lenin, “that bald guy—a genius.” In 1917, during the Russian Revolution, he offered a simple message to the Russian people, whether they were soldiers, peasants or workers, Iglesias said. “Lenin didn’t talk about ‘dialectical materialism.’ He talked about ‘bread and peace.’ And that is one of the main lessons of the 20th century.”



People shout slogans and hold flags during a march of Podemos (We can) political party on January 31, 2015 in Madrid, Spain. According to the last opinion polls Podemos (We Can), the anti-austerity left-wing party that emerged out of popular movements and officially formed last year, has wider support than the traditional parties of Spain, the Spanish Prime Minister's right-wing party Partido Popular and the main opposition party, the Socialist (PSOE). Credit: Pablo Blazquez Dominguez/Getty

‘Punishing the Party’

Whether pragmatism can help Podemos win in November’s parliamentary elections is an open question. Some fear that the party’s strategy is too ambiguous, and

that Iglesias won't be able to reconcile the grassroots desires of the Indignados with those who want the party to operate more conventionally. Recent polls show support for Podemos may be leveling off, and some predict the party's popularity will slide further in the coming months, especially if Syriza fails to deliver in Greece.

Lola Sánchez hopes the naysayers are wrong. Her ability to afford to live in Spain depends on it. She understands the public's skepticism about Podemos. But she's confident that enough Spaniards will trust in the party's ability to improve their lot. "We've had only one year of life, and we have had to decide a lot of things," she told me. "We are still building our party and our program. But people are very clear about the kind of country they want to live in."



Justin Sutcliffe/Polaris

AFGHAN WOMEN DREAD DEPARTURE OF U.S. FORCES

RAPE, PHYSICAL ABUSE, KIDNAPPINGS AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION ARE ON THE CARDS AS WESTERN FORCES LEAVE.

When a shepherd's daughter from northern Afghanistan succeeded in sending the four policemen who had gang-raped her to jail, it seemed to be a turning point for Afghan women.

In May 2012, 21-year-old Lal Bibi from Kunduz was repeatedly raped for five days by local policemen. One of them had had a dispute with her cousin, and Lal Bibi was the object of their revenge.

Such stories, sadly common in Afghanistan, usually end there—with the girl shamed, unmarriageable and perhaps outcast in a shelter, while the perpetrators go free—for this is a society where men with guns have power.

Lal Bibi ended up in a shelter, broken and unable to speak. But her family stood up for her, particularly her grandfather. In the shelter she met Mary Akrami, an activist who runs the Afghan Women's Skills Development Center and was one of the first women in Afghanistan to set up shelters for battered women and girls.

Backed by her tribe and helped by Akrami, Lal Bibi and her family bravely went to court in Kabul. In November 2012, they succeeded in getting her rapists convicted—a court decision hailed by human rights groups worldwide. If only the story had ended there.

As the judge announced the 16-year sentence, the convicted police commander pointed at the family and shouted, “I’ll be free one day, and I’ll deal with you people!”

The family was scared and remained in Kabul, sheltered by Akrami. Then in early 2014, Lal Bibi’s grandfather died, so they returned to their village. Within hours, her father was arrested by the police commander’s men, and falsely accused of killing someone. He remains in jail, and Lal Bibi and her family have been forced to go back in hiding.

Akrami receives threats every day. She has had two miscarriages because of the stress. Her husband has pleaded with her to stay at home, but she refuses to give up.

“We are the only ones to stand up to these powerful people,” she says. “We can’t give in.”

Many women are terrified of what will happen when foreign troops leave.

It's easy to forget now, but Western leaders often cited repression of Afghan women as a key reason for toppling the Taliban regime after 9/11. In his January 2002 State of the Union speech, after the fall of the Taliban, President George W. Bush declared: "The last time we met in this chamber, the mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school. Today, women are free."

Akrami is the first to say that things have improved enormously for women compared to life under the Taliban. Then, women could not work, go to the bazaar, wear white shoes or laugh out loud. They could be beaten or jailed for wearing nail polish or lipstick, and the shapeless blue burqa that they were forced to wear became synonymous with women's repression. Girls were not allowed to go to school.

"Then, women couldn't go out of house," says Akrami. "Now, they're going to court. But as Lal Bibi's case shows, society is not ready."

Activists like Akrami fear that Western commitment to the freedom of Afghan women is being forgotten in the rush to get out of Afghanistan. They are terrified of what will happen to women with NATO troops gone.

There were no women among the eight candidates in Afghanistan's April 2014 presidential elections, and just one—Dr. Habiba Sarobi, former governor of Bamiyan—on any of the slates (as second vice president). There were, however, two warlords running for president (and four as running mates) who are known for trampling on women's rights.

"When you go from darkness to light you have to pass through shade," says Sarobi. Yet many women say that things are already going backward, into the dark.

As someone who has gone back and forth reporting on Afghanistan throughout the 13 years since the Taliban were toppled, I have seen the situation of women visibly improve.

In the ancient city of Herat, the day after the Taliban fell there in November 2001, I came across a group of courageous female writers and poets who had met secretly under the guise of a sewing circle throughout the Taliban years.

Though they arrived for meetings with fabric and scissors, they never made a single garment. Instead, led by a literature professor at the university, they discussed Shakespeare and Virginia Woolf as well as their own work. I was astonished that they had risked their lives to be able to write.

They also ran secret classes for girls. Today, it is a common sight to see lines of schoolgirls on their way to lessons, book bags proudly in hand. Of the estimated 8 million Afghan children in school, 2.4 million are girls. The number of students going into higher education has increased from just 4,000 in 2004 to more than 120,000 in 2012, and about a quarter of these are girls.

In cities like Herat and Kabul there are women drivers—admittedly only a handful. Afghanistan even has female rappers, though one of them, Remika Khabiri, says she has to hide her face or she gets abuse spat at her, even by fellow students at Kabul University.

Even in the remotest villages, life has changed for women. Microfinance loans for projects like dressmaking or beekeeping have turned illiterate women who had never worked outside the home into entrepreneurs earning more than their husbands.

Last year, I traveled north to Samangan, one of Afghanistan's poorest provinces. The area is so arid that the mud houses blend into the mountains; the province is dotted with ghost villages, completely abandoned as people fled war and poverty.

There, in a village called Asiabad, I met an amazing woman named Kubra. Her house stood out because of the

two white-and-yellow taxis standing outside along with a cow.

Like most Afghan village women, Kubra looks much older than the 50 years she claims. Her skin might be wrinkled and weather-beaten, but she is like a human dynamo—her hands waving back and forth like windmills and her black button eyes flashing as she leads the way into a pink treasure palace of a room full of ribbons and sequins and old-fashioned Chinese sewing machines.

“Nine years ago, I was a very poor simple woman,” she says. “I’d been married off at 13, as my parents could not afford to feed me. Then I had 11 children, as I didn’t know any different, and my husband worked in the fields growing wheat. You can see nothing grows, so there were many days when we had no food or just one meal.”

Then Kubra’s village was visited by Afghan Aid, a British charity that has worked in Afghanistan for 30 years. Aid workers suggested that the women learn tailoring and lent Kubra 80,000 afghanis (\$1,400) to buy machines and material and trained her on their use.

“I worked day and night so I could buy another,” Kubra says. She passed her skills on to others, and now she has 16 village women sewing, taking orders for weddings and selling their work in nearby villages. “Now my income is more than my husband’s!” She smiles broadly, showing gold teeth.

The economic empowerment has had other effects. “Before, I couldn’t even go to the bazaar on my own,” Kubra says. “No female was allowed to sit with men. Now our men have accepted that women can go outside. Now my daughters go to school, and one even has a job registering the voters for election.”

With their new income, the women formed a savings group and used the money to set up a small convenience store from which they divide profits. Kubra also purchased

a cow, which provides milk for curds, and with the money from the cow's produce, she bought a car for the sewing group—which doubles as a taxi driven by her son. Recently, she added another taxi. “I am slowly moving up the ladder,” she says, laughing as she mimics climbing the rungs with her fingers.

Kubra also administers vaccines for the community against tuberculosis and polio—skills she learned by watching a video. “I’m illiterate, but am good at fixing things in my head.”

The village will soon have electricity, and Kubra has already bought an electric sewing machine.

When Kubra and her fellow women sit and sew, their main topic of conversation is what will happen when the NATO troops leave. Having tasted independence, she says, there is no way they will relinquish it.

“If the Taliban tried to come back now, although we don’t have weapons, we have power and we would resist.”

Afghanistan’s changes go to the highest levels. Women hold three cabinet-level posts, a quarter of seats in parliament (the U.S. Congress, by contrast, is only 18 percent female) and there is one female provincial governor.

Unlike President Hamid Karzai's wife, who was never seen in public, Rula Ghani, the wife of new president Ashraf Ghani, has set up a first lady's office and is very visible. She is a Lebanese Christian and the couple have two grown American children. "I don't think I have magical powers," she said in March. "I will be very happy if at the end of the five-year mandate women are better appreciated and more respected for what they are."

At the start of 2014, more history was made: the appointment of Afghanistan’s first female police chief. Colonel Jamila Bayaz now heads the station in the Mandayi bazaar right in the teeming heart of Kabul. Amid wooden stalls selling combs, belts and Justin Bieber posters, Colonel

Bayaz commands about 400 police in a region that she thinks has 500,000 inhabitants until her deputy corrects her—it's 1.5 million.

“This is a chance not just for me, but for all women of Afghanistan,” she says, sitting in her upstairs office, surrounded by plastic flowers and trays of almonds and pistachios, as a stream of friends comes to congratulate her.

The 50-year-old mother of five says that she always dreamed of following in her father's footsteps and becoming a police officer; “I saw it as a way to help people, and I loved the uniform!” she laughs.

In her black headscarf and gray uniform with silver and red epaulets, Bayaz cuts an impressive figure. As she carries out her weekly inspection of Kabul's District One police, it's a stark contrast to her male subordinates—an unruly sight clad in a mishmash of uniforms, leather jackets, torn anoraks and assorted headgear.

Back in her office, Col. Bayaz answers phones, signs papers and briefs staff as her 12-year-old son sits on the sofa looking bored. “He refused to go to school, as he complains he never sees me at home,” she said. “I work 24 hours a day.”

Bayaz first trained during the Soviet occupation, working as a police officer until Taliban fighters invaded the capital. September 26, 1996, is a day she says she'll never forget. “When I walked home, I changed from a police officer to an ordinary woman,” she says. “The Taliban stopped everything. It was as if they had stopped life itself.”

Twice she was beaten: once for showing an ankle and another time for taking off her burqa before she entered her house, unaware anyone was watching.

After the Taliban left, she went back to the police force, receiving new training from American, British and Norwegian experts. The job took her to Colorado, Miami,

New York, Dubai, Cairo—even Siberia. “It was all very different to policing here,” she says.

Bayaz describes her promotion as a “victory for all women of Afghanistan.” She would not be drawn on the fact that in Helmand province, two fellow female police officers were recently assassinated.

“What we’re seeing in Afghanistan today is two opposite faces,” explains Hassina Safi, executive director of the Afghan Women’s Network. “On one side, we’re seeing promotion of women like Jamila to key positions as a result of our advocacy over the last years—and at the same time, there is no security for women, and we’re seeing the systematic killing of women working outside, especially in police and defense.”

“People need to realize the gains we have made are fragile and we still need help,” Safi adds.

A few miles away from Bayaz’s police station is the Kabul stadium where the Taliban publicly lashed women. A cavernous room inside the stadium is host to an unexpected scene: a dozen female boxers sparring and aiming punches, laughing and teasing as their trainer barks instructions.

They’re hoping to qualify for the next Olympics. Once, there were 25 of them, and each received \$100 per month in allowance as well as transport provided by international aid.

The aid money has dried up. All they have now are their boxing gloves and a room to train in. More than half of the original participants have dropped out.

As the outside world loses interest in Afghanistan, says Mary Akrami, the Afghan women’s groups once fêted by Western donors are all now seeing their funding collapse. “I believed women’s rights were a global issue and thought we had women from all the world behind us, but now I see we’re alone.”

Brave women activists have been dreading the departure of foreign troops.

“We will be the first target,” says Akrami. “If, God forbid, something happens during the transition, we’re the ones on the front line.”



Jamila Bayaz, chief of police in Kabul and the first ever female Police Chief in Afghanistan, stands in her office on January 30, 2014. At 20, she was a top-notch engineering student at Kabul University. After two months in school Bayaz quit and enrolled in the city's police academy. Her father was a police officer in Kabul. Now 50, Bayaz is a colonel in the Afghan National Police Force. Credit: Justin Sutcliffe/Polaris

Already there are signs of progress slipping away.

The Afghan parliament recently reduced the percentage of seats reserved for women from a quarter to a fifth; those women MPs say they have no power anyway.

Habiba Danish was a teacher in the northern province of Takhar who was forcibly married to a local police commander at age 17. She joined parliament in 2005 to try and help other women. Instead, she finds that the courts will not listen to her, and she receives constant threats to the life of her 12-year-old son, whom she raised as a single mother after the commander was killed.

“The situation for women is very bad, even for women like me in positions of power,” Danish says. “In the past, the men running the country had long beards. Now they are short, but the mindset is the same. Every day they call, saying, ‘We will kill or kidnap your son’”

In August 2013, one of Danish’s colleagues, female senator Rooh Gul, was shot as she traveled through Ghazni Province. Gul survived, but her 8-year-old daughter was killed.

Danish is terrified that the situation will deteriorate further as foreign troops leave. “Oh my God, it will be very bad,” she says. “Right now, with the international presence, our commanders and government are afraid to go too far, but when they go, these people won’t be afraid of anything. If all the troops leave, I will try to go, too.”

One of Danish’s fellow MPs, Noorzia Atmar, traveled the world as a symbol of women’s rights, but back home her own husband was beating her. She ended up in a shelter, and recently fled the country.

Danish, Atmar, Akrami and Safi were in the vanguard of an attempt to get parliament to pass a law criminalizing violence against women. They ran campaigns across the country, and received endorsements from clerics in other Muslim countries, like Egypt.

Not only did their efforts fail, but the Afghan parliament instead approved a new criminal code that banned relatives of a criminal defendant from testifying against them. Given that most violence against women in Afghanistan is at the hands of husbands or in-laws, the change would effectively silence victims and make it impossible to prosecute abusive spouses or parents who force children into early marriages.

The change provoked international outrage, and ultimately Afghan President Hamid Karzai did not sign the new code. But its near-approval showed how precarious the changes for women are.

One woman who discovered this the hard way is Shafiq, an illiterate farmer's wife from Dewari village in Takhar. She has given up all she has to seek justice after her daughter Zainora was abducted and brutally murdered three years ago.

Shafiq looks at least 20 years older than the 40 years she says she is. She sobs and wipes her eyes on her leopard-print scarf as she tells her story, scattering photos of her daughter and sheaves of court documents that she cannot read.

"We are poor people; my husband grows tomatoes and potatoes," she says. "Zainora was like a jewel—the most beautiful girl in the village." One day when Zainora was 18, she simply disappeared during lunch time. After 10 days, her family discovered that she was abducted by a military commander and his friend Basir, the nephew of Qazi Kabeer, a powerful conservative MP.

Shafiq's husband, Haji Zada, went to the MP and begged for his daughter back. When Zainora finally appeared, she said that five men kidnapped her, forced her to smoke hashish and dance and repeatedly gang-raped her. "Father," said Zainora, "the shame will be really bad."

"Qazi Kabeer realized it would be very bad for his reputation if people found out, so he told us that his nephew would marry Zainora and gave us 50,000 afghanis [about \$880]," says Shafiq. "My husband told him my daughter

also needs a house, land and gold. Qazi Kabeer said ‘I will give her those things; you should be proud your daughter is marrying a rich man.’”

In fact, it was just a ruse. After the marriage, Zainora found that she was pregnant and went home to stay with her parents. Three months later, her husband Basir came late one night with his men and said that he was taking Zainora back in hopes that she could look after family guests while his mother was in India.

“She was happy,” says Shafiq. The next time she saw her daughter was in the back of a police van, covered with blood. The men had tossed her out of the car onto a hillside and fired 33 bullets at her. “When I saw my daughter’s body, I wanted the person who did that to hang.”

Shafiq decided to go to the provincial governor and local courts. “The judge in Takhar asked for 120,000 afghanis [about \$2,100] to proceed with the case. He told me to bring a box of grapes as a gift and put the money inside.”

Instead, she took a bus to Kabul for the first time in her life. She found her way to Tolo TV and told her story. President Karzai saw the interview, and his office told her that Karzai would look after her. “They put me in a government guesthouse, but after a month, nothing had happened.”

Shafiq received a call informing her that her younger daughter Shazia, age 15, had been abducted. Shazia’s kidnapper, a police commander who was a cousin of Qazi Kabeer, made her dance and gave her alcohol and hashish. “When your family stop all these complaints,” Shazia was told, “we’ll release you.”

After 33 days, Shafiq found out where her younger daughter was. “My husband and son were really scared and didn’t want to go, so I went with another woman.” They found her in a basement. “My daughter was sick and in a very bad state,” Shafiq says. “No one will marry her now.”

When they returned home, villagers went out and protested against Qazi Kabeer saying: “You did this to these poor people; next time, you will do it to us.”

That wasn’t the end. Shafiq’s son was picked up and put in jail—falsely accused, Shafiq says, of kidnapping people. Their house was set on fire, although people from the village helped put out the flames before the house was destroyed.

“Qazi Kabeer told me, ‘You gave me a bad name, so I will do whatever I can against you,’” says Shafiq. She has sold all that her family once owned to try and get the case heard and her son freed. “I am afraid of God, but not Qazi Kabeer,” Shafiq says. “But it seems President Karzai and everyone else is.”

Qazi Kabeer claims that Shafiq and her husband killed their own daughter and are just trying to get money.

Hearing such stories and visiting shelters full of girls who have fled forced marriages, it is easy to become despondent about Afghanistan. There are certainly enough grim stories to make anyone despair for the future. But telling those stories is important: As long as they are told, then there is at least the possibility of bearing witness to the long struggle of Afghan women for better lives, a more equal society and a better country.

One of the brave poets I met in Herat, Nadia Anjuman, was killed by her own husband because he did not want her writing about women’s issues.

Her grave is now a shrine to local women; but it is also a reminder to the outside world of promises once made, promises that the West must not forget.

*Christina Lamb is the author of **The Sewing Circles of Herat: My Afghan Years** and **I am Malala**, co-authored with Malala Yousafzai. Her new book, **Farewell Kabul: From Afghanistan To a More Dangerous World**, is published in April. She serves as a Global Fellow at the Wilson Center. This article **first appeared** in the **Wilson Quarterly**.*



Skip Sterling

SYRIAN LIFE EXPECTANCY DROPS OVER 20 YEARS

**AS THE WAR ENTERS ITS FIFTH YEAR, A NEW REPORT
DETAILS SYRIA'S ENORMOUS LOSSES.**

As the conflict in Syria enters its fifth year, a new report says life expectancy for Syrians has plummeted by more than 20 years over the course of the war.

Before 2011, Syrians could expect to live, on average, 79.5 years. In 2014, life expectancy dropped to 55.7,

according to “[Syria: Alienation and Violence, Impact of the Syria Crisis](#),” a report published this month by the Syrian Center for Policy Research, in Damascus.

“There was a substantial increase in death rates due to the crisis, especially conflict-related deaths, which almost doubled in 2014,” said Christopher Gunness, a spokesman for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), one of the U.N. agencies that helped with the report. “Increasing death rates among youth, who had a low probability of death before the crisis, became a significant component in the regression of life expectancy.”

The peripheral ravages of the war, such as the destruction of health care facilities, difficulty accessing childhood vaccines for tuberculosis and polio, and an increase in poverty, have also reduced life expectancy.

The nearly 30 percent drop in life expectancy, combined with the loss of 15 percent of the Syrian population—largely due to a refugee exodus—is called a “silent calamity” in the report. Syria’s population now stands at around 17.65 million, down from 20.87 million in 2010. Four million refugees have fled, mainly to Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey. Inside Syria, nearly 7 million people have been displaced. Six percent of Syria’s population has been maimed or killed during the war.

Before the war, Syria’s life expectancy was on par with developed European countries such as Hungary and Latvia, and the leading causes of death were [heart disease and stroke](#). In just four years, life expectancy has become comparable to that in countries like Burundi and South Sudan. The change puts Syria among the [worst countries](#) in the world in terms of health. The U.K.-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights has recorded the deaths of more than 214,800 people between March 18, 2011, and March 8, 2015. It says at least 65,881 civilians have been killed, including 10,798 children and 6,889 women. More

than 3,000 of the dead cannot be identified, and the real death toll is thought to be much higher.

Fighting has also devastated Syria's economy, which has lost \$202.6 billion from the war's destruction and the loss of capital. Four out of five Syrians are now living below the poverty line, and unemployment is at 58 percent. Half of all Syrian children haven't attended school in the past three years, the report says.

On Wednesday, a **separate report** from New York-based nonprofit Physicians for Human Rights claimed the government was responsible for the deaths of 610 doctors and 32 barrel bomb attacks on 24 medical facilities over the past four years. It said that 139 of them were tortured or executed and that hospitals and medical personnel were "targeted" for their work. In 2014, one medical worker was killed every other day, and every four days a hospital was bombed or shelled, the group says. The government has previously been accused of mistreatment of its civilian population, including abduction, torture and execution. A new exhibition at the U.N. headquarters in New York shows a series of **photos** smuggled out of Syria allegedly showing victims of systematic killings by forces loyal to Assad.

Life expectancy is expected to keep declining as the war goes on. And even if the fighting were to stop suddenly, Syria's crippled health care system means life expectancy will continue to decrease, says Zaki Mehchy, a researcher with the Syrian Center for Policy Research. "The indirect impact is expected to continue after the crisis," he says.



Blend Images/Alamy

THE UGLY CIVIL WAR IN AMERICAN MEDICINE

A GROUP OF DOCTORS IS CHARGING THAT THE AMERICAN BOARD OF INTERNAL MEDICINE HAS FORCED THEM TO DO MEANINGLESS WORK TO FATTEN THE BOARD'S BLOATED COFFERS.

Updated | Are physicians in the United States getting dumber? That is what one of the most powerful medical boards is suggesting, according to its critics. And, depending on the answer, tens of millions of dollars funneled annually to this non-profit organization are at stake.

The provocative question is a rhetorical weapon in a bizarre war, one that could transform medicine for years. On one side is the American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM), which certifies that doctors have met nationally recognized standards, and has been advocating for more testing of physicians. On the other side are tens of thousands of internists, cardiologists, kidney specialists and the like who say the ABIM has forced them to do busywork that serves no purpose other than to fatten the board's bloated coffers.

"We don't want to do meaningless work and we don't want to pay fees that are unreasonable and we don't want to line the pockets of administrators," says Dr. Paul Teirstein, a nationally prominent physician who is chief of cardiology at Scripps Clinic and who is now leading the doctor revolt.

The physicians lining up with Teirstein are not a bunch of stumblebums afraid of a few tests. They include some of this nation's best-known medical practitioners and academicians, from institutions like the Mayo Clinic, Harvard Medical School, Columbia Medical School and other powerhouses in the field.

This spat is hardly academic, though. Some doctors are leaving medicine because they believe the ABIM is abusing its monopoly for money, forcing physicians to unnecessarily sacrifice time with their patients and time for their personal lives.

A little history: For decades, doctors took one exam, usually just after finishing training, to prove they had absorbed enough medical knowledge to treat patients. Internists—best known as primary care physicians—would take one test while those who chose subspecialties of internal medicine—cardiovascular disease, critical care, infectious disease, rheumatology—sat for additional exams. Doctors maintained their certification status by participating in programs known as "continuing medical

education,” which, when done right, keep physicians up on developments in their field.

The value to a doctor of being certified can scarcely be overstated. Many organizations will not hire uncertified doctors. And, without that stamp of approval, even doctors who open their own practices rarely receive permission from hospital boards to treat their patients in hospitals. It was a sensible way to make sure doctors stayed on top of their game and weed out incompetent clinicians.

Someone, of course, had to pay for the testing and continuing education, and it was usually the doctors. So physicians shelled out money to the ABIM to take the tests, and then ponied up more cash to attend conferences and other programs for continuing medical education. Few objected—it was worth the money to keep up the profession’s standards.

But then ABIM decided that rather than just having doctors take one certification test, maybe they should take two. Or three. Or more. Under this new rule adopted in the early 1990s, internists and subspecialists recertify every 10 years with new tests. In other words, a doctor certified at the age of 30 could look forward to taking an ABIM exam at least three more times before retirement. This was not cheap—doctors spend thousands of dollars not only for the tests, but for review sessions, for time away from their practices. And with each new test, the ABIM made more money.

Physicians sheepishly went along with the process, assuming their good old pal the ABIM was working hard to make sure medical practitioners were fully qualified.

Then, something strange happened, doctors say. The tests started including questions about problems that had nothing to do with how doctors did their jobs. For example, endocrinologists who worked exclusively with adults said they were forced to answer questions about endocrinology for children, even though the pediatric information was irrelevant to their practices. Heart specialists who do not

perform transplants – and even those at hospitals with no heart transplant programs – said they had to study techniques for reading transplant tissue slides and how best to evaluate these patients so they could answer questions on the tests. But that knowledge was unrelated to the care they provide to their real patients, they said, and took time that they could have spent learning the latest medical findings about the cardiology work they actually perform. Videos and study sessions sold to help doctors prepare for re-certification exams often featured instructors saying physicians would never see a particular condition or use a certain diagnostic technique, but they needed to review it because it would be on the test. “Exam questions often are not relevant to physicians’ practice,” Teirstein says. “The questions are often out-dated. Most of the studying is done to learn the best answer for the test, which is very often not the current best practice.”

The result? According to the ABIM’S figures, the percentage of doctors passing the recertification test started dropping steadily. In 2010, some 88 percent of internists taking the maintenance of certification exams passed; by 2014, that had fallen to 80 percent. Hematologists dropped from 91 percent to 82 percent. Interventional cardiologists went from 94 percent to 88 percent. Kidney specialists, 95 percent to 84 percent. Lung experts, 90 percent to 79 percent.

Wow. Was it Obamacare? Ebola? A sign of the end times? What was turning so many American doctors so stupid all of sudden? Not to worry, the ABIM declares—the board could help doctors keep their certification. All they had to do was pay to take the tests again. Making doctors appear ignorant became big business, worth millions of dollars, and the ABIM went from being a genial organization celebrated by the medical profession to something more akin to a protection racket.

The ABIM disputes that characterization. Lorie B. Slass, a spokesperson for the ABIM, says “there have been and always will be” fluctuations in test results, since different groups of doctors are taking the exam each year. But in each of the categories cited above, there are no statistically significant fluctuations—the passing rate keeps going down. So the point remains: Either doctors are getting dumber each year, or the test that helps determine who gets to practice medicine has less and less to do with the actual practice of medicine.

Slass says the suggestion that the ABIM is “purposefully failing candidates on their exams to generate more revenue is flat-out wrong.” Maybe so, but according to the Form 990s filed with the Internal Revenue Service, in 2001—just as the earliest round of new-test standard was kicking in—the ABIM brought in \$16 million in revenue. Its total compensation for all of its top officers and directors was \$1.3 million. The highest paid officer received about \$230,000 a year. Two others made about \$200,000, and the starting salary below that was less than \$150,000. Printing was its largest contractor expense. That was followed by legal fees of \$106,000.

Twelve years later? ABIM is showering cash on its top executives—including some officers earning more than \$400,000 a year. In the tax period ending June 2013—the latest data available—ABIM brought in \$55 million in revenue. Its highest paid officer made more than \$800,000 a year from ABIM and related ventures. The total pay for ABIM’s top officers quadrupled. Its largest contractor expense went to the same law firm it was using a decade earlier, but the amounts charged were 20 times more.

And there is another organization called the ABIM Foundation that does...well, it’s not quite clear what it does. Its website reads like a lot of mumbo-jumbo. The Foundation conducts surveys on how “organizational leaders have advanced professionalism among practicing

physicians.” And it is very proud of its “Choosing Wisely” program, an initiative “to help providers and patients engage in conversations to reduce overuse of tests and procedures,” with pamphlets, videos and other means.

Doesn’t sound like much, until you crack open the 990s. This organization is loaded. In the tax year ended 2013, it brought in \$20 million—not from contributions, not from selling a product, not for providing a service. No, the foundation earned \$20 million on the \$74 million in assets it holds.

The foundation racked up \$5.2 million in expenses, which—other than \$245,000 it gave to the ABIM—was divided into two categories: compensation and “other.” Who is getting all this compensation? The very same people who are top earners at the ABIM. Deep in the filings, it says the foundation spends \$1.9 million in “program and project expenses,” with no explanation what the programs and projects are.

There are some expenditures, though, that are easy to understand: The foundation spends \$153,439 a year on at least one condominium. And it picks up the tab so the spouse of the top-officer can fly along on business trips for free.

The ABIM is not what it was. Its original mission was to make sure doctors provide patients with the best care. When condominiums and lavish salaries and free trips and making money off of physicians failing tests became a priority, the evidence suggests the organization lost its way.

But that may not matter soon. In January 2014, when the ABIM issued a series of new requirements for maintaining certification—that would have generated all new fees—Teirstein and his colleagues declared “enough.” They recently formed a new recertification organization called the “National Board of Physicians and Surgeons.” It will only consider doctors for recertification who have passed the initial certification exam that has been required for decades. Doctors must also log a set number of hours

with programs that qualify under guidelines as continuing medical education. The group's fees are much, much lower than those charged by the ABIM. And its board and management—all top names in medicine—work for free.

This new board is not just about breaking the ABIM monopoly, Teirstein says, but is also part of an effort to put the right people in charge of the profession's future. Medicine has been “controlled by individuals who are not involved with the day to day care of patients,” he says. “It is time for practicing physicians to take back the leadership.”



Amanda Mustard/Redux

CHINA'S NOT-SO-SECRET GAME PLAN

A NEW BOOK ARGUES THE AMERICAN ESTABLISHMENT HAS MADE A MAJOR MISCALCULATION ON CHINA.

For all the bloodcurdling horrors inflicted daily by the Islamic State (ISIS), and with all the high-stakes drama of the nuclear negotiations with Iran, it's easy these days to forget what may well be this generation's most important foreign policy challenge for the United States: dealing with the rise of an ever-more-powerful China.

For decades now—going back to China’s historic opening under Deng Xiaoping—the prevailing notion in the United States has been that Washington and its allies must help China incorporate itself into the world’s existing structures (its security arrangements, trading system, dispute-settlement organizations, multilateral institutions, etc.). As Beijing grew ever larger economically (and thus more powerful geopolitically), it needed, in other words, to find a home in a system drawn up and largely led by the United States in the wake of World War II.

For a brief time, after economically successful East Asian countries like South Korea and Taiwan made a successful transition from authoritarianism to democracy, a new conceit among the foreign policy establishment emerged: Given enough time and space, China, too, would shuck its authoritarian government (of the Communist variety) in favor of democracy. That proved a fantasy, a product of wishful thinking not intellectual rigor—and fewer and fewer foreign policy professionals believe it these days. What we’re left with is the task of making China’s rise as smooth as possible, something that surely the grown-ups running Beijing must want too, we all assure ourselves. (The most thoughtful recent rumination along this line came from Henry Kissinger, author of the historic opening to China under Richard Nixon, in his 2011 book, *On China*. Kissinger argued that Beijing and Washington could avoid outright conflict and reach a state of “combative coexistence.”)

Now along comes Michael Pillsbury, whose intention is to shred the U.S. foreign policy establishment’s conventional wisdom. He’s the author of a new book, *The Hundred-Year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower*. Pillsbury’s been a China watcher his entire professional life, as a former Pentagon official who also served as a staffer on Capitol Hill. (He’s now the director of the Center on Chinese Strategy at the Hudson Institute, a conservative think tank.) And as you can deduce

from the title of his book, he has no patience for anyone who thinks China is simply going to slip into a U.S.-dominated world order and eventually coexist benignly as one of two superpowers.

To the contrary, he thinks that since the Communist Party came to power in 1949, its goal has been to be No. 1—the global superpower—and that it is executing a grand strategy to achieve that aim by 2049, exactly a century after the revolution. More to the point—and here it looks as if an excitable editor at Henry Holt trying to sell books got a central tenet of the book wrong in the title—Pillsbury argues that this is not by any means a secret strategy. He contends—and demonstrates pretty convincingly—that this goal has been hiding in plain sight for years.

Hiding in plain sight, that is, if you're a fluent reader and speaker of Mandarin, and, like Pillsbury, know where to look in the tightly controlled—but not entirely inaccessible—world of defense and military thinking in China. Indeed, Pillsbury writes of being invited to a People's Liberation Army (PLA) conference in Beijing in which China's long-term strategy is discussed openly. He writes that he was permitted to attend in part because his Chinese colleagues—hawks who don't hide their desire for China to ultimately supplant the U.S. as the global superpower—like the fact that he pays attention to what they say and write. Books are available in military bookshops accessible only to PLA members and their occasional invited guests—like Pillsbury. He scooped them all up and read them. He's also talked over the years to dozens of PLA strategists (several of whom are openly identified in the acknowledgements section at the end of the book, while others have to remain anonymous). His conclusion is bracing and, it should be said, widely rejected by a foreign policy–academic establishment that has not yet responded thoughtfully to his substantive arguments. “It's easy,” Pillsbury writes, “to win a race when you're the only one who knows it has begun. China is thus on its

way to supplanting the United States as the global hegemon, creating a different world as a result.”

Central to Pillsbury’s thesis is that the views of a group of strategists in the party and the military in Beijing—known as the ying pai, or hawks—are not out of the mainstream in Chinese thought (as commonly assumed in the West) but rather define the mainstream. This is, to be sure, a matter of debate—and one, given the opaque nature of the Chinese government, that is very difficult to assess. But give Pillsbury his due: He makes an argument—detailed and rigorous. The establishment needs to respond.

And, further, also give him this: Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, China’s behavior in its backyard has changed. It has bullied what it regards as weaker neighbors, whether in disputes over small islands off the coast of Japan or the Philippines, or over oil exploration rights off the coast of Vietnam. Most recently, satellite images have shown Beijing building new islands in the South China Sea— islands that would presumably be used for new military installations.

Pillsbury would argue that such aggressive behavior has marked a predictable change in China’s stance in accordance with the 100-year marathon strategy: It is making a transition. For the past 30 years, China’s pose—and Pillsbury indeed believes it’s been a charade, to emphasize weakness and gain access to Western technology and capital—has been “Woe is me, we’re so poor, we have so many problems, please help us by giving us technology and investing in our poor backward country.” That is now over. China is strong and getting stronger; Xi evinces a public self-confidence unseen in China’s most recent bland leaders. And it’s apparent he’s not going to let little pissant countries like Vietnam or the Philippines—or even Beijing’s historic enemy, Japan—distract it from claiming what China believes is hers.

In the inner councils of the party in Beijing, Pillsbury maintains, Chinese scholars and strategists focus on how they can get the United States to go down easily—to step aside with some grace, as Great Britain did after World War II—rather than having to fight a war against it.

In the concluding chapter, Pillsbury asks: What should the United States do about this? Some of his prescriptions land with a distinct thud. He says the United States should stop sending “experts” from various government agencies to help China—for example, no more bureaucrats from the Department of Labor who have, over the years, helped China “increase its productivity.” (Someone needs to tell Pillsbury there are these things called Fortune 500 companies, every one of which has invested millions of dollars in China. They are the ones helping China make its economic leap—not planeloads of government bureaucrats. And what’s Washington going to do? Tell General Electric and Microsoft and General Motors to stop investing in China? Lots of luck with that.)

Some of his prescriptions, though, make strategic sense. A popular board game in China is wei qi, in which the goal is to surround your opponent. It is, Pillsbury argues, central to China’s strategic thinking. And there has at least been a nod in this direction in the Obama administration’s so called “pivot” to Asia. By strengthening formidable alliances—Japan, South Korea—and forging new ones where possible (India, Vietnam, Myanmar), the U.S. can effectively surround China, at which point those who are not ying pai will see the futility of their strategy and chart a different, less hawkish course.

My view—I’ve been in China for the past nine years—is that the Obama administration’s “pivot” is more rhetorical than real. As far as I can tell, the president still can’t figure out whether China is a strategic competitor or a strategic rival, and in any event his main obsession when it comes to the bilateral relationship seems to be about the crisis

formerly known as global warming, a.k.a. climate change. (Believe me, Pillsbury's ying pai are chortling about that one.)

The question—is China a rival determined to supplant Washington on the world stage, or is it willing to coexist?—is not, of course, an easy one to answer. Pillsbury writes, correctly, that Beijing is not monolithic. He believes the hawks are ascendant now but that need not remain the case. He's also right that for Washington, assessing the nature of China's ambition, and responding to it effectively, may be the central foreign policy challenge of our time. Pillsbury's thesis is provocative—and discomfiting. But that doesn't necessarily mean it's wrong.



Joel Sartore/National Geographic Creative

CAMOUFLAGE MATERIAL CHANGES COLOR AT A TOUCH

**NATURAL ANIMAL IRIDESCENCE INSPIRES A NEW
MATERIAL THAT CAN CHANGE COLOR AT YOUR
FINGERTIPS**

There are few avian creatures more striking than the peacock. The male peafowl stomps and screams, struts with his crested head held high and, when displaying his

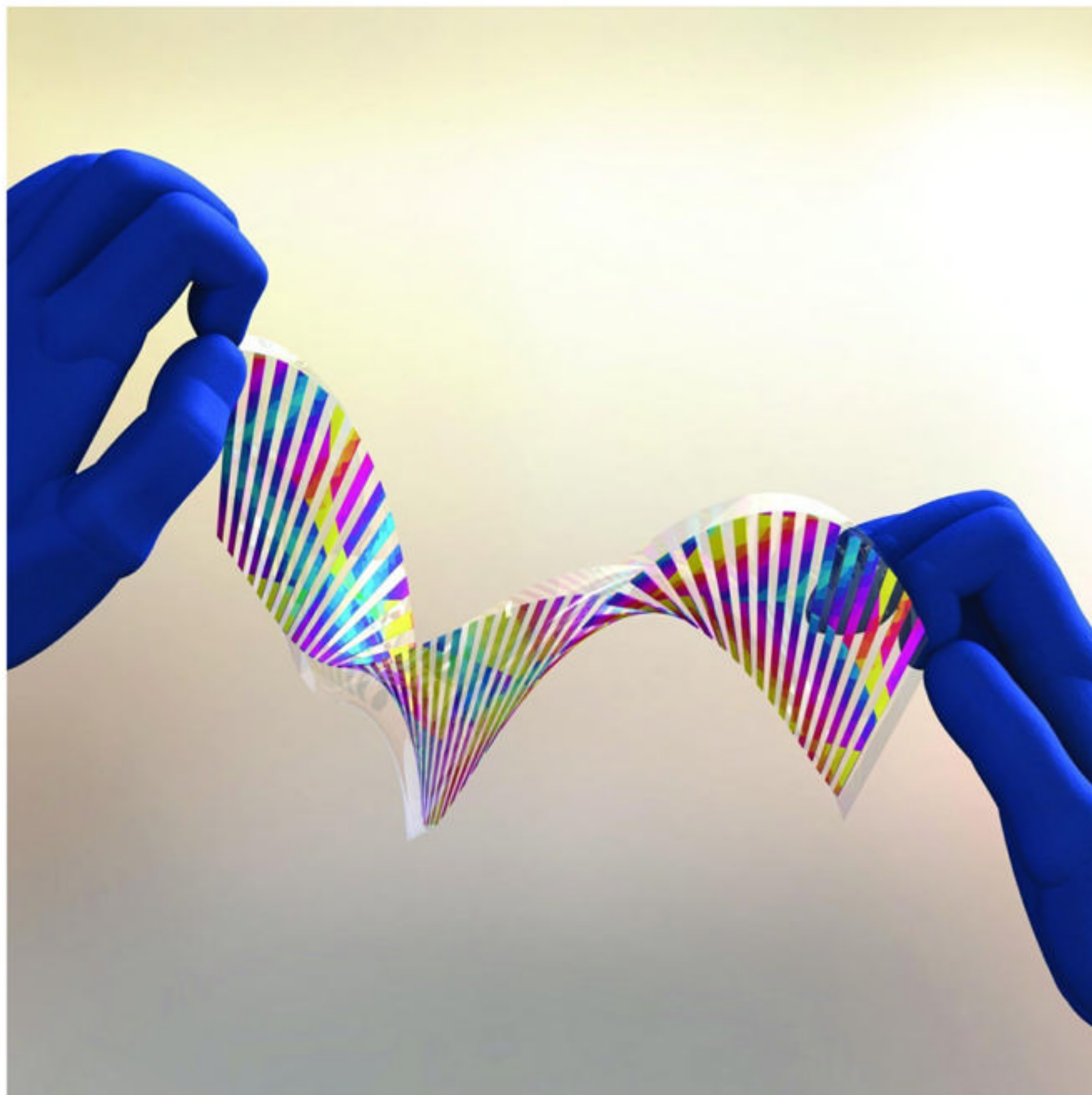
elongated train of tail feathers, appears like a walking rainbow.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the peacock's elaborate plumage is its color, an iridescent blue-green-gold. The iridescent coloring, which changes appearance based on both the angle light hits the bird or the angle at which you see it, has nothing to do with the actual pigments in the feathers but is instead due to nanostructures of fiber-like components that interfere with light and, essentially, cause the bird's tail feathers to play tricks on your eyes.

This is called structural coloration—which can also be seen in other creatures, like morpho butterflies—and it was the inspiration for a team of University of California, Berkeley, engineers who recently **announced in the journal *Optica*** the design of a new material that can be made to change color simply by applying a tiny bit of physical force. They're calling it a "chameleon-like skin."

To create the material, the team etched rows of ridges onto a single layer of silicon, just 120 nanometers thick. For scale, consider that a human hair is about 100,000 nanometers thick. The ridges are cut at an angle, and when the rows are just the right distance apart, they reflect only a precise wavelength of light, i.e., a specific color. When you bend or flex the silicon, the spacing between the ridges changes, shortening or lengthening, and the color shifts.

The first piece of material the team manufactured generated colors that could shift from green to yellow, orange and red. The researchers believe they can figure out how to create almost any color.



The artificial “skin” changes color as a minute amount of force, such as giving the material a slight twist, is applied. Credit: The Optical Society (OSA)

For testing purposes, the team created just one square centimeter of the material. The next step, says study co-author Connie J. Chang-Hasnain, is to scale up to a size practical for commercial applications. No worries: There already are facilities out there with the capability to do it, she says.

And because the stuff is so thin and pliable, its potential seems nearly limitless. The obvious application is camouflage: A tank or other military vehicle sheathed in a material that could change colors depending on its surroundings would be a powerful weapon. The design, says Chang-Hasnain, could be adapted so that, for example, the color change could be done by applying a slight electrical

charge to the material. It's something "we intend to do in the future," she says.

Chang-Hasnain also suggests that the silicon design could be applied toward the development of ultra-sensitive and easy-to-read sensors that would change color to indicate otherwise imperceptible changes in "structural fatigue" in things like bridges and the wings of airplanes. "When a structure is under stress or strain, it may expand or shrink," she says. "The flexible 'skin' attached to such surface would be stretched or squeezed," which would then change its color.



Robert Galbraith/Reuters

APPLE DIDN'T INVENT THE SMART WATCH, BUT IT WILL DO IT BETTER

**STEVE JOBS GETS TOO MUCH CREDIT FOR HIS IDEAS
AND TOO LITTLE FOR THE WAY HE CONDUCTED HIS
COMPLEX SYMPHONY.**

About 15 years ago, I met a fascinating old man in Huntsville, Alabama. He had white hair and a big white mustache, wore glasses the diameter of hockey pucks and

spoke in a heavy accent from his native Bulgaria. In the 1960s, he helped engineer the Saturn V rockets that took American astronauts to the moon, and not long after, he invented the Apple Watch.

Well, sort of. This man, **Peter Petroff**, who died in 2003, guided the development of the first digital watch. Branded as Pulsar, it came out in 1972 and cost \$2,100—more than \$12,000 in today's dollars, in case you think the price tag on Apple's Watch is extortionate. You can see a Pulsar **displayed** at the Smithsonian. In the history of smart watches, the Pulsar is the Neanderthal to Apple's Homo sapiens; the Ma Rainey to Apple's Beyoncé. They are entirely different things, but not, and the first led to the second, with a thousand evolutionary mutations in between.

The point is that no person or company invented any smart watch; the global technology zeitgeist did. Most inventions, by the time they arrive, seem inevitable, a natural offspring of all the technologies, ideas and societal practices swirling around at the time. Steven Johnson describes this beautifully in **Where Good Ideas Come From**—they come from millions of connections and ideas, building on one another in meetings and news accounts and academic papers, simmering in clever minds until they are recognized by the right person looking in the right place. If Thomas Edison had spurned inventing to become a street mime, it's not as if we'd be reading by gas lamps today. Someone else would've tapped the zeitgeist and lit us up.

That's not to put down invention, but when it comes to impact, invention is over-celebrated. The greater value of technology to society—the value Apple has unlocked time and again—is in its execution.

Apple didn't invent the personal computer, but it created the Macintosh, based on ideas Steve Jobs largely pinched from Xerox. Apple didn't invent the digital music player, smartphone or tablet, but its iPod, iPhone and iPad kicked the asses of all the previous “inventors” and

“innovators” in those spaces. In each case, Apple assembled the right technology at the right time, designed a product and ecosystem better than anyone else’s, lined up the best suppliers and distribution channels, and created demand with well-tuned marketing and an unmatched élan.

The ability to do all that hard execution stuff, and do it so well, is why Apple is worth more than any company now. It’s why Apple’s **Watch** will redefine and dominate its space. Jobs gets too much credit for his ideas and too little for the way he conducted his complex symphony.

Google is another fitting example of execution over invention. By 1996, many new technologies were busting into the tech zeitgeist: PCs, the Internet, the Mosaic browser and the hypertext links that made possible the World Wide Web. The first search engines, such as Alta Vista, were based on an older idea that was more like document searches at libraries, looking for keywords on a page, and it didn’t work all that well. At Stanford University, Larry Page and Sergey Brin started experimenting with ways to use the hypertext links to rank search results and find better matches. Essentially, the pair remixed existing technology in a clever way and made something better than its predecessors.

As so often happens, at least two other people had pretty much the same idea at the same time, according to Steven Levy’s Google biography, **In the Plex**. One was Jon Kleinberg, then doing a fellowship at IBM’s research center in Almaden, California. The other was Yanhong Li, working at Dow Jones. If either of those big companies had developed and executed on the search invention, we might now be IBMing or Dowing for information. But Page and Brin followed through, created Google and defined and dominated the search space. Execution was more important than the idea.

This dynamic has played out throughout history, described back in 1922 in an oft-cited **article** by William F.

Ogburn and Dorothy Thomas, *Are Inventions Inevitable?* They point out, for example, that in 1831, an American professor, Joseph Henry, built what was probably the first telegraph. About the same time, versions appeared in England and Germany. Thirteen years later in the U.S., Samuel Morse developed his telegraph and a system that made it useful. Morse executed. The other inventors pretty much disappeared from history.

Cars, planes, railroads, the telephone, television, computers, email, social networks, online book selling—almost anything you can name had multiple inventors around the same time. Ask any venture capitalist in Silicon Valley and she'll tell you that she suddenly starts seeing multiple, overlapping pimply entrepreneurs pitching the same idea. The best VCs bet on the companies that can actually carry it through. In most cases, a latecomer—Henry Ford, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos—designs a better version, does the hard execution work and defines and dominates a space for years.

Philippe Kahn, who in 1997 invented and patented the cellphone camera, sparred with me over emails about invention, which he asserts drives the U.S. economy. “Do we want everything to boil down to: How cheap is it to manufacture with exploited overseas workforces?” Kahn wrote. “Aren’t innovation and invention and their rightful protection more important than quarterly profits? What kind of economy do we want?”

Kahn assembled the first phone camera out of other then-new technologies—the cellphone, the digital camera, the cell network—because he wanted to share photos of his newborn daughter. His employer, Motorola, passed on the idea. Kahn formed a company, LightSurf, to build and market what he called PictureMail. But today we don’t use PictureMail to fire off that naked selfie. We use an iPhone and Snapchat. LightSurf, in the long run, pushed the process along, which

is valuable. But it didn't execute in Apple's society-altering way.

It's like the story of the Pulsar, which still exists as a brand of watch that is neither digital nor smart. PictureMail is gone, but it led to iPhone cameras and Snapchat photos, with a thousand mutations in between. Inventors see the connections first and give us a push—a head start on the future. Yet the world is truly changed by those who get inspired by a “Bo-Weevil Blues” and then deliver a “Single Ladies.”



Lenmart Priess/Siemens

RISE OF ROBOT FACTORIES LEADING 'FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION'

**ULTRA-CUSTOMISED PRODUCTS BUILD THEMSELVES
WHILE CAR PARTS TALK TO EACH OTHER IN EUROPE'S
AUTOMATED FACTORIES.**

Busy day? A million things to do? Well, here's depressing news: you'll probably mess up about 1,000 of them. That's what the research shows, at least: for every

million tasks a human performs, even the best of us inserts mistakes between 500 and 1,000 times. It might seem a lot, but think of the number of emails you send containing a typo, the number of dishes that make it to the drying rack with a fleck of food still on them, the gaffes when talking with colleagues, the mismatched socks you only spot at lunchtime.

None of these slip-ups is likely to prove very costly, whether in terms of time, money or reputation. But the stakes grow higher in certain environments: a pharmacist getting a dosage wrong can take a life; a trader with “fat fingers” can cost his employer millions. It was with this idea in mind, just over 25 years ago, that a team of engineers and scientists at Siemens began to rethink one particular shop floor. The factory in Amberg, a small town near Nuremberg in Germany, made controllers – the boxes stuffed with circuit boards and switches that act as brains for other factories. And it did a pretty good job of it, with customers from across countries and sectors, and a defects per million rate of 550.

But even that number felt too high, particularly given that a broken controller can quickly shut down a factory, costing its owners millions of euros per day in stopped production alone. So the team at Siemens began moving the factory towards greater automation, counting on computers to beat humans in the race for quality. In 1990, 25% of the shop floor was automated; today, it is 75%. And the defect rate has dropped sharply – to 11.5 per million. Output has increased 8.5 times while employee numbers and floor space have stayed steady.

Amberg has become something of a showcase for what automation can achieve; Angela Merkel visited in February and called it an example of Germany’s wealth of “ideas and well-educated workers”. But its real interest for managers, politicians and workers is what it can tell them about the future. The plant is Siemens’s testing ground for

a huge development in automation, where factories act less as the setting for a series of sequential steps and more as networks – networks in which assembly lines communicate not just with one another or within the company, but with systems elsewhere and – this is key – with the very products being produced. An automobile bonnet rolls up to the paint machine and tells it, “I should be white”; the next one sends the message to paint it blue.

In Germany, the engineers and academics working to create this “fourth industrial revolution” call it Industrie 4.0; in the US it’s referred to as “the industrial internet”. General Electric describes it thus: “[It is] the tight integration of the physical and digital worlds . . . [enabling] companies to use sensors, software, machine-to-machine learning and other technologies to gather and analyse data from physical objects or other large data streams – and then use those analyses to manage operations.”

It is also, according to Volkmar Koch, a partner at the consultancy Strategy&, a chance for Europe to lead where in the past it has followed: whereas digitisation of the consumer world “is basically owned and shaped by US companies”, no country or region yet dominates the transformation of industry.

You might expect a world built on sensors, software and machines to be devoid of humans. But in Amberg, the 10,000-square-metre shop floor is populated by 1,020 workers over three shifts. And their labour looks relatively physical: a young man lying on his back inches his way under an elegant blue-and-grey machine, as you would under a car needing repair; a woman nearby bends over a circuit board wielding tweezers. Yet other members of staff peer at screens, never touching the products rolling down glassed-in assembly lines.



Robot arms weld bodywork at the Porsche factory in Leipzig, Germany.

Credit: Sean Gallup/Getty

“A digital future can frighten people,” says Günter Ziebell, production unit leader in Amberg. “But we complement automated tests with eye checks.” More to the point, this project has created demand for people with

experience and creativity, who can improve the processes. So the management structure in Amberg has become very flat, allowing, for example, line workers to speak with the IT department directly rather than go through their bosses. Any employee can initiate a project that requires an investment of less than €10,000, and managers simply check every quarter that their teams are neither spending too much nor too little. Employees also earn bonuses when they suggest changes that are later implemented. The average employee earns an additional €1,000 per year this way, says Ziebell. He stresses the importance of schemes like this: “If a digital factory is being managed top-down, you wouldn’t get many advantages from it.”

But even if increasing automation hasn’t sapped jobs in Amberg, fast-growing efficiency means new plants might have been built to meet rising customer demand – and new positions to fill them – are now unnecessary. It is an issue that the Germans, at least, are attempting to address head-on, with plans under way to form a national-level working group for Industrie 4.0 that includes employee representatives as well as private businesses and industry bodies.

Dieter Wegener, Siemens’s coordinator for Industrie 4.0, argues that companies aren’t pushing these developments forward – consumers are. We want customised products, we want them now, and we want them made efficiently, whether to bring down prices or preserve natural resources. This isn’t possible without networked production processes. As Mr Wegener says, “This is coming from you and me.” He also argues that Germany is at least two years ahead of the industrial internet community in the US “but we appear as if we’re following the Americans. The Americans are better at marketing.”

Roman Friedrich, a Strategy& expert on digitisation, is more cautious: “By definition, these changes are happening with such speed that you might not stay dominant for long.

There are pockets of excellence and we see shifts in who's ahead every year."

And still, there are serious challenges to overcome, beyond what all of this might mean for workers. Standardisation is one; it doesn't do much good for your soda bottle to signal to a bottling machine if they don't speak the same language. A survey by the consultancy Accenture found last year that a third of companies eager to embrace the industrial internet cited "consolidation of disparate data" as a grave concern. And that didn't just mean data from along the supply chain, where different companies need to find similar standards, but also between departments in their own operations.

Security, inevitably, was another top worry. Technicians at Siemens's headquarters in Munich have recently started trying to hack into the Amberg factory's systems, as tests to protect against the real deal. To take full advantage of "smart factories", every link in the supply chain must be secure – a huge challenge, and one with an inherent conundrum in that taking full advantage of "smart factories" also necessitates allowing a wide distribution of information; in Amberg, any employee can see the real-time data about each product on the assembly line. Companies must find a way to find a balance between transparency and security.

For Wegener, a third challenge is remembering the factors, such as efficiency, customisation and speed, that are driving the revolution (or evolution, as he prefers) – and making sure Big Data isn't tapped simply for the sake of tapping Big Data. It has to add specific value to each operation. "There's no benefit to making something smart," he says, "without it making sense"



Reuters

HOW TO END FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN EGYPT

IN A COUNTRY WHERE 91 PERCENT OF MARRIED WOMEN HAVE BEEN CUT, IT WILL TAKE AT LEAST A GENERATION TO ERADICATE FGM.

The ghost that haunts Mansoura Mohamed's nightmares is an old lady dressed in black.

This apparition dates back to a summer in the late 1980s, in the village of Seflaq, Egypt. Summer is the season in

Egypt for female genital mutilation (FGM); tradition states that when the dates on the palm trees turn red, it's time. Mohamed, just 7 at the time, and her three cousins were all cut on the same day. Her mother wanted her to go first, to show how committed their family was to the tradition. The cutter, an old woman and a *daya*, or traditional midwife, yelled and beat her as four women held Mohamed down in her father's house, while her mother waited outside. She remembers that there were a lot of towels and a lot of blood.

Today, Mohamed is 33. She still lives in Seflaq, with her husband, Ragab, and her 14-year-old daughter, Ghada. She is regularly visited in her sleep by the specter of the woman who cut her as a child. Ragab and Mansoura have chosen to spare Ghada from FGM, the removal of the external female genitals for nonmedical reasons. It's a decision that, though still atypical, is becoming more prevalent among young families in Egypt.

The country has the world's highest rates of FGM: **91 percent** of married women, according to Egypt's 2008 Demographic and Health Survey (the last year for which data are available). Among younger and better-educated women living in urban areas, as well as those who never married, the rates drop—but only to around 81 percent. In Egypt, as in most of the countries in Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia where FGM is performed, it's a cultural tradition with roots going back centuries. Egypt stands out because of its large population: More women and girls from Egypt have been cut—**27.2 million**—than anywhere else in the world. “If we can eradicate this practice from Egypt, we can get rid of [more than] one-fourth of all cases worldwide,” says Jamie Nadal, Cairo representative for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The government is on board. In 2007 the Egyptian Ministry of Health issued a decree banning FGM; the following year Parliament criminalized the practice, establishing a minimum sentence of three months and

maximum of two years, along with a fine. It's a start, and the hope is that the next Demographic and Health Survey, expected to be out this spring, will show FGM rates dropping.

Chastity From a Scalpel

Around the globe, an estimated 130 million women and girls alive today have undergone FGM, also known as female circumcision, and millions more are at risk of being cut, according to the UNFPA. Depending on the country, the practice can range from cutting off part or all of the clitoris to the total removal of the vaginal lips, and then sewing together whatever tissue remains. Some girls are cut when they are just a few weeks old, while others are made to undergo the process when they reach puberty.

The parents of these girls are often driven by the belief that they can make sure their daughters are “clean” and “pure.” In many parts of the world, including Egypt, people believe FGM dampens sexual urges. Parents think it will translate into chastity, and give a daughter good manners to boot. The challenge is to transform the common fallacy that the clitoris is the dangerous root of sexual power into an understanding that it is an organ girls deserve to keep, and to convince Egyptians that a good daughter is the result of good parenting—not a mutilation.

FGM predates both Islam and Christianity: An ancient Egyptian tradition involved throwing the tissue-wrapped clitoris into the river and sacrificing it to the god of the Nile, according to Vivian Fouad, spokeswoman for Egypt's National Population Council. Yet many people still believe it's a practice mandated by the tenets of Islam. “[FGM is] a cultural practice that has been given a religious justification,” says Rothna Begum, a researcher for the Middle East and North Africa women's rights division of Human Rights Watch. Begum says getting people to recognize that FGM is not a religious requirement can make

all the difference. Which is why, she says, “in order for it to be tackled, you do need the religious officials on board.”

Advocates are trying to enlist religious leaders to spread the message. Imams, bishops and priests have attended workshops at nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and spoken to their congregations about how there is no religious basis for FGM. At the International Islamic Center for Population Studies and Research, part of Cairo’s Al-Azhar University, a training program has been set up for Muslim religious leaders who will make preaching about the dangers of FGM a part of their weekly Friday prayers.

Health care workers are the next target: 72 percent of Egyptian girls who have been cut were cut by a doctor or other professional health care worker. Worldwide, one out of every five girls who undergoes FGM will be cut by a doctor, according to the UNFPA. Years of advocates speaking out about the health complications from FGM drove parents to the perceived safety of health professionals, says Dr. Khaled al-Oteifi, lead FGM coordinator at Egypt’s Ministry of Health, but a recent landmark FGM trial provides stark evidence that the procedure can be deadly no matter who carries it out.

In June 2013, a 13-year-old girl, Sohair al-Batea, died from what is **officially listed** as an allergic reaction to penicillin after allegedly undergoing an FGM procedure in a private clinic northeast of Cairo. Egyptian media **reported** that al-Batea died from a sharp drop in her blood pressure resulting from anesthetic drugs given to her by the doctor, Raslan Fadl. Fadl turned himself in, claiming that he had done the procedure at the request of al-Batea’s family, and that there was no medical wrongdoing. In January 2015, after a year and a half of legal proceedings, an appeals court in Mansoura convicted both Fadl and al-Batea’s father of illegally performing an FGM. It was the first-ever FGM trial in Egypt.

It's hard to pin down the exact numbers of girls who, like al-Batea, die from FGM every year. Female circumcision is often performed under the guise of some other medical procedure, so it's impossible to get an accurate count—when a girl dies from an FGM procedure, it's almost always blamed on some other cause.

For doctors, especially those working in rural areas, there's a strong financial incentive to do FGMs, despite its criminalization in 2008. Doctors can earn up to \$26 for one, much more than the \$2.60 they can charge for a regular doctor's visit (although still significantly less than they can make for other specialty procedures—Lasik eye surgery, for example, costs about \$655). Advocates say that in recent years doctors have begun making clandestine visits to villages, arriving at night and often under the guise of circumcising boys. "No doctor goes to circumcise a girl at 3 in the morning unless he knows he's doing something wrong," says Mona Amin, national project coordinator for the FGM abandonment and family empowerment program at Egypt's National Population Council.

There's no training for FGM in the country's medical schools, although the UNFPA is developing a curriculum for obstetricians and gynecologists that will have to be approved by the Egyptian Ministry of Health before it can be taught. Until then, the ministry is running a program to teach doctors what they didn't learn in school: that every part of the genitalia is a functioning part of the female body and that by performing the operation they violate human rights and medical ethics. It is also training doctors how best to explain to parents bringing in their daughters to be circumcised that there are harmful physical and psychological consequences.

The Cruellest Cut

Awatef Mohammed Ali is considering circumcising her 10-year-old daughter, Shahd. Recently, they sat together in a light purple room in the village of Bani Zeid el-Akrad, near Assiut in Upper Egypt. Shahd sat wide-eyed and fearful next

to her mother, ignoring the paintings of Tweety Bird and other cartoon animals on the walls. Ali, who has attended anti-FMG workshops, says her daughter will be circumcised next summer, but the family will first consult a doctor, who will decide whether Shahd needs it. If the doctor says it will harm her, they won't do it, she says. Ali, who was circumcised, "doesn't want to stop the habit" of FGM, and her husband is determined to get his daughter cut.

Advocates in Egypt hope the practice will peter out as people start thinking of FGM as a crime rather than a tradition—and begin to more openly discuss the traumas associated with the practice. In many places, workshops are held to educate the community about the medical and psychological dangers of FGM. For example, at the Islamic Society Center, an NGO in Seflaq, women share their stories of childhood trauma in a windowless room. Ahlem Abdel el-Samen recalls the "black day, a very bad day" when she was cut at 10. Mary Labib Sweifi was 1 week old when she underwent FGM and doesn't remember a thing. Mariam Naeem Mossad, a Christian woman wearing pearl earrings and a long red and blue leather jacket, was 9; four women pinned her down. Mossad, who has an 11-year-old daughter, remembers seeing her mother constantly changing blood-soaked sheets. But she says the family tradition of FGM stopped with her. "Even if I had 100 daughters, I would not do it," she says.

On the walls of the center there are drawings of women on operating tables and childlike depictions of razor blades and blood. On a table, a white shawl embroidered with a pink flower and a pair of scissors serves as a constant reminder.

Travel and accommodations in Egypt for this story were paid for by the United Nations Population Fund.



Ray Avery/Getty

*BEHIND THE MUSIC
BEHIND THE MUSIC:
'WRECKING CREW'
PLAYED POP'S BIGGEST
HITS*

"THE WRECKING CREW," A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT THE STUDIO MUSICIANS WHO PLAYED FOR ELVIS, SINATRA, THE BYRDS AND OTHER BANDS, SHINES THE SPOTLIGHT ON THE PRICE (AND BENEFITS) OF OBSCURITY.

In the 1988 David Mamet film *Things Change*, Joe Mantegna's character seeks a Mafia don who's "the guy behind the guy behind the guy." There is an appetite among rock fans for that kind of powerful obscurity, and while it may not be entirely healthy for the music (rock impresario Bill Graham said dancing died when people started asking each other who the bass player was), it's certainly lucrative for those who want to pull back the curtain.

Imagine if the entire *Wizard of Oz* was about the man behind the curtain. The recent success of documentaries like [20 Feet From Stardom](#) (about some of rock's best female backup singers) and [Muscle Shoals](#) (about the legendary Alabama studio session men) proves the point; while both did well in theaters, they really took off online and on demand, the true refuge of music nerds. They're like the film equivalent of [Mojo magazine](#), with its endless supply of new stories about old artists in their prime.

Now comes [The Wrecking Crew](#) (in theaters, and on iTunes and video on demand, on March 13), about the loose confederation of studio musicians in L.A. who played behind everyone from Frank Sinatra to the Byrds. While no one thought Sinatra was playing anything (he couldn't, nor did he write music, though he certainly knew what he wanted his records to sound like), fans of bands like the Byrds and Buffalo Springfield assumed the guitarists in those groups knew how to play their instruments. The Monkees famously pretended to be working in the studio for a reporter while the real musicians hid in the other room. A member of the Association, a band that played virtually not a single note on its biggest hits of the '60s ("Along Comes Mary," "Cherish," "Windy"), told one of the Crew, when asked why they wouldn't list the musicians' names on a jacket, "We don't want kids to know we didn't play on the record."

Produced and directed by Denny Tedesco, son of the Crew's legendary guitarist Tommy Tedesco, this doc was

a long time in the making. There is footage of Dick Clark and Frank Zappa when they were still alive, and Cher when she could still move her face. Denny began filming and interviewing people in the mid-'90s, when his father was diagnosed with cancer. Tommy was a big soulful guy who managed to be a good father and husband while working 90 hours a week. At its best, *The Wrecking Crew* is a paean to work and the men (and one woman) who managed to play while they worked and made making hits look easy.

The group got its name from drummer Hal Blaine (whose opening beat to “Be My Baby”—boom-boom-boom pow! boom-boom-boom pow!—is one of pop music’s most thunderous), who says older studio musicians, mostly a suit-and-tie crowd, were dismayed by the newcomers. “We come in wearing blue jeans, smoking and the older guys said, ‘They’re gonna wreck the business.’” (Some of the musicians, notably bassist Carol Kaye, say they were known as the Clique and have gone on to **dispute the film’s emphasis on Blaine and Tedesco.**)

Not that the Crew were a bunch of rockers. Most of them came up with jazz and classical training—though Blaine says he got his best education working in strip clubs in the '50s—and started playing rock and roll because that’s where the money was. Guitarist Al Casey began listening to 45s and bending the strings a bit: “I got to where I could play that stuff better than they could,” he says. The Crew recorded two singles for the Byrds, with only Roger McGuinn playing along, in an hour (one of them was the No. 1 hit “Mr. Tambourine Man”). When the band insisted on doing it themselves the second time in the studio, it took 77 takes to get “Turn! Turn! Turn!” right. (That, too, went to the top of the charts.)

Kaye was the one woman of the bunch; her bass lines built the foundation for the Beach Boys’ “Good Vibrations” and “California Girls,” not to mention the “Mission: Impossible” theme, “Wichita Lineman” and thousands of

other songs and jingles. There were other women in the business then, she explains; they just didn't last. "Most women in the '50s would play until they got married. It was more important to have a 'Mrs.' in front of their name than to have a career."

Her attempt to define Phil Spector's Wall of Sound (Spector worked almost exclusively with the Crew at Gold Star studio, owned by David Gold and Stan Ross) and the musicians' contribution to it is enlightening: "More like a lost feeling," she says of the background they added to Spector's most magisterial production, the Righteous Brothers' "You've Lost That Loving Feeling." "Despite the baffles we all leaked into each other's mikes. It was a combination of leakage and echoes; plus we were all really tired after the 35th take. It had a real relaxed feeling."

Relaxed yet imposing—that might be a good description of Spector's sound, and the Crew's as well. While Spector worked his musicians almost sadistically, usually not even running any tape for the first three hours, most artists and producers put themselves in the Crew's hands. "One year I was making more money than the president of the United States," says Kaye.

One of rock's best-known bass lines came not from Kaye but Chuck Berghofer, a regular for producer Lee Hazlewood, who played on Nancy Sinatra's proto-dominatrix classic "These Boots Are Made for Walking." "If I hadn't been available that day, I'd probably be selling insurance somewhere," he says. (Of the song's lyric, Sinatra observes, "It's harsh and abusive for a guy to sing"—as the late Hazlewood performed it—"but perfect for a little girl." Kitten with a whip!)

While Muscle Shoals suggested that there was something in the water down there in Alabama that made that studio's house band, the Swampers, so special, The Wrecking Crew makes a compelling case for hard work and timing. Almost none of the cohort came from L.A. (Who does?) Tedesco

came from Niagara Falls, and saxophonist Plas Johnson couldn't wait to get out of the segregated South. The New Orleans native had that sultry sax sound rock bands wanted. He played on the 1962 hit “**Surfer's Stomp**” and was one of the Crew members who came to resent their anonymity. “Worse than not getting the money was not getting your name on [the record],” he says. “They got some white kid just out of high school and put him on the road.”

Most of the members interviewed (and more than a few passed away in the 20 years it took Tedesco to finish the film) are more philosophical. Blaine, one of rock's most influential and ubiquitous drummers, lost everything in the wake of one of several disastrous marriages, and worked for a while as a security guard in Arizona. In the divorce settlement, he sold every gold record that lined his walls but returned to play with everyone from the Captain and Tennille to Steely Dan and became one of the first sidemen to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, in 2000.

Occasional Crew member Leon Russell, looking like a pimp Santa with his dark glasses and a cane, started off playing demos for \$10 a song. “I got to eat that day,” he says of that time. And though he says most of the hit recordings he did with Hazlewood and producer Snuff Garrett (“This Diamond Ring,” “Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves”) weren't really “my cup of tea,” they wouldn't have sounded as good without him.

Most of the time, the musicians honored in *The Wrecking Crew* were working on dross and jingles, the daily diet of session men everywhere. Playing for geniuses like Spector or Brian Wilson was their good fortune, but those producers and arrangers were just as lucky to have these musicians. Cher, who was a teenager when she started recording with the Crew, has some of the most evocative memories in the film. “There was always a *Mad* magazine being passed around,” she said of those sessions. Of the volatile, unstable Spector (now serving 19 years to life for

second-degree murder), she recalls, “Phil was walking in another universe. In his mind, it was all him. These guys were doing what he couldn’t do.”



Retales Botijero/Getty

THE BAD NEWS ABOUT GOOD NEWS

**THE HAPPY-FICATION OF DIGITAL JOURNALISM IS SO
CUTE. AND SO DANGEROUS.**

On the evening of November 24, 2014, a grand jury in St. Louis County, Missouri, declined to indict Darren Wilson, a white officer with the Ferguson Police Department, for the killing of black teenager Michael Brown. The next day, there were protests all over the country. One of those protests took place in Portland, Oregon. In the midst of that demonstration, a white

police officer, Sgt. Bret Barnum, hugged a black 12-year-old, Devonte Hart. Their embrace was captured by the photographer Johnny Nguyen. Once online, the image went viral, a symbol of healing and hope at a time of despair and strife. The Oregonian, which first published the photograph, later called it “[the hug shared around the world](#),” noting that it was posted on Facebook 150,000 times in the immediate wake of its publication. That number would rise dramatically in the ensuing days, as the image achieved the kind of virality your average infectious disease can only dream of: As of this writing, [the original Oregonian post](#) has 444,000 Facebook shares and 9,700 retweets. In fact, the story of what happened to the image quickly eclipsed what was happening in the image.

The moment between Barnum and Hart seemed to affirm that this is, as Louis Armstrong once growled, a wonderful world. But the hug also spoke to a more mundane truth, one Satchmo never had to ponder: On the Internet, news of how wonderful the world can be sells. Entire digital enterprises are devoted to images, videos and stories meant to inspire and uplift. On the [The Good News Network](#), for example, you are greeted with a paean to fatherhood: “Single Dad Couldn’t Do Daughter’s Ponytail, So Went to Cosmetology School.” There are plenty of others: DailyGood (“News that inspires”), “Gimundo” (“Good news... served daily”) and The Intelligent Optimist (“an independent international media platform focused on solutions, possibility and inspiration”). Though less explicitly geared to good news, [Upworthy](#) is nevertheless the master of the genre: “Economists Assume People Are Self-Interested. He Turned That Assumption Upside Down” and “If You Take a Puppy Video Break Today, Make Sure This Is the Dog Video You Watch.”

Take that, ISIS beheading videos!

“We need to be informed by a worldview that is not dripping with sensationalism and attuned to the police

scanner,” the editor of the Good News Network recently told the Columbia Journalism Review, **which deemed the trend “the glass-half-full beat.”** Whether the beat can also fill corporate coffers—a fair question in an age when many newsrooms are prepping their own obits—nobody has ascertained with satisfaction. “Researchers are discovering that people want to create positive images of themselves online by sharing upbeat stories. And with more people turning to Facebook and Twitter to find out what’s happening in the world, news stories may need to cheer up in order to court an audience,” **Eliana Dockterman wrote for Time in 2013.**

Last year, however, Quartz described how a Russian website, City Reporter, decided to devote itself, for a single day, to “a smorgasbord of sunshine, lollipops, and rainbows.” It promptly lost the majority of its readers. “Our fascination with negativity may be even more pervasive than we thought,” Quartz concluded.

The battle has been joined, you inspiration editors and optimism ninjas!

The lure of the feel-good viral video is seducing even vaunted newsrooms in Manhattan. **In a recent staff memo,** Huffington Post founder Arianna Huffington announced that her mammoth aggregating outfit would “start a positive contagion by relentlessly telling the stories of people and communities doing amazing things, overcoming great odds, and facing real challenges with perseverance, creativity and grace.” She pronounced dead “the era of ‘if it bleeds, it leads.’”

A similar sentiment was expressed by Shani O. Hilton, the news editor of BuzzFeed, **in an interview with Capital New York.** “I like to like things, and it's nice that I work at a place where our default stance is to like things,” she said. It was odd to see a news editor—and a highly capable one, judging from what I've read—strike a tone of uncritical receptivity. Isn't the whole point of journalism

to have a skeptical attitude toward the powers that be? Aren't we supposed to practice a relentless curiosity about whether things truly are as they seem? If the answer is in the negative, journalism has just become an arm of publicity.

Hilton was partly responding to the snark of sites like Gawker, which mock everything and its mother. And, to be fair, BuzzFeed has done some excellent investigative journalism. Still, it's troubling to think that a news outlet visited monthly by millions considers winsomeness a fundamental feature of its reporting. Because, at some point, liking things reflexively turns into cheerleading. And cheerleading is easily and regularly manipulated by those with power into propaganda. Indeed, the newspapers of my Soviet youth, Pravda and Izvestiya, radiated endless optimism about the mighty smelters of Sverdlovsk, the unassailable glory of Leninism-Marxism, capitalism's coming death throes.

We all know how that turned out.

Look, I know I am coming across as a hater, but I'm a lover in disguise. When BuzzFeed published its famous 2012 listicle "[21 Pictures That Will Restore Your Faith in Humanity](#)" (mostly [lifted from Reddit](#), but, hey, whatevs) I damn near bust a lachrymal duct. I will retweet anything involving dachshund puppies. And that picture of the white cop and the black kid? It deserved every Facebook "like" bestowed upon it, including mine.

I also concede that inspiring news predates the advent of the listicle. You could argue, for example, that the famous Tank Man image from Tiananmen Square is Upworthy-worthy, a rousing symbol of the human spirit uncowed by tyranny's onslaught. Except that, in ages past, that image would have been inextricably bolted to context, images and words working together to tell a single coherent story. There would have been a complex narrative couching the photograph, like necessary layers of adipose tissue: of the 1989 student demonstrations in Beijing, of the relentless

repressions of the Chinese Communist Party. Today, you can find that image on Listverse: “[15 Incredible Historical Photographs](#).” The entirety of the Tiananmen uprising is granted three sentences below the photograph.

That Portland hug photo, too, quickly became detached from its context, floating free in the digital ether. Yet there was more to the story than the racial comity presented by Nguyen's photograph: for one, the racial strife that led up to that moment, not to mention the myriad other forces that culminated in #BlackLivesMatter. To reduce all these to a single photograph, no matter how inspiring, is to deceive, to lie about the complexity of the world. This is true of all meme-journalism, whatever its mood: It trades on the illusion that a three-minute mash-up or 15 GIFs can explain, say, the Greek debt crisis or the rise of the Islamic State. But we know better—don't we?

There's weird and crucial twist here: Good news is a fundamentally illiberal project. I don't mean that it is the demesne of red-staters, a nefarious Koch brothers plot. Rather, it assumes a Hobbesian vision of a world in which man is almost always wolf to man, in which cruelty and avarice hold sway. News, in that case, becomes a respite from our unseemly lives, making journalism a palliative exercise, a form of forgetting. Here, look at these cuddly marmots. Here, look at that cuddly Jimmy Fallon. It beats thinking about female genital mutilation, the Midwestern meth epidemic and the melting polar ice caps, about which you can do nothing anyway, since you are a helpless, miserable creature in a huge, malevolent world.

Bad news, paradoxically, reaffirms human goodness. The New York Times doesn't publish stories about Boko Haram and Chinese sweatshop abuses and bankrupt California municipalities out of some grim compulsion, a dour eat-your-peas impulse, a perverse desire to ruin your day. Deep down, animating every righteous muckraker, intelligently outraged editorialist and dogged investigative reporter is the

romantic conviction that the world can be made better. That if the exploits of the wicked are made public, the good will rise up to correct them. That, moreover, mechanisms exist for justice to prevail, if only sometimes. That, above all, what Ernest Hemingway wrote is true: “The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for.” But the fighting might take you out of your mash-up comfort zone, might require more neural effort than clicking through a slideshow of 1990s sitcom has-beens.

Seen in this context, good news of the kind Huffington now seeks to promulgate is a public menace. It’s sirenic, a call to blindness, a “happy” filter placed on a world that is often good but frequently not. It may be inspirational, it may be uplifting, but it precludes having to do any real work, whether in thought or in action. If happiness reigns, you might as well relax.

But some of us don’t want to spend our day in enraptured ignorance, tending to our precious chakras. We want to be engaged, even with a world that is often aggravating, distressing and painful. It’s like the beloved lefty bumper sticker, affixed to so many dusty Volvo bumpers, proclaims: “If you’re not outraged, you’re not paying attention.” Or, rather, you might be paying too much attention to the Upworthy version of the world, in all its happy unreality.



Steve Marcus/REUTERS

MEET THE CHICAGO TEEN BEHIND ‘ON FLEEK’

**BRANDS AND CELEBRITIES ARE CLAIMING THE VIRAL
PHRASE, BUT A CHICAGO-AREA HIGH SCHOOLER
NAMED KAYLA NEWMAN DESERVES CREDIT.**

For a few hours on March 1, it seemed as if the phrase “on fleek” would bring down the music industry. Nicki Minaj called out fellow artist Christina Milian for selling merchandise with the phrase “Pretty on fleek,” words that Minaj raps on her latest album. “I saw Christina sellin tshirts

that say Pretty On Fleek. I was waitin on my percentage at the door! *tilts head*,” Minaj **wrote** on Instagram. Milian’s **apparent** response, which no longer appears online: “Been saying on fleek everything for a while now.”

The two celebrities **patched things up** on social media later in the day, but the beef over who owns “on fleek,” which essentially means “on point,” left out the person truly behind the phrase—a high schooler in the Chicago suburbs named Kayla Newman, who says she came up with the term on the spot and used it in a six-second video **posted to Vine** last June.

“We in this bitch, finna get crunk. Eyebrows on fleek, da fuq,” she says in the video, stroking her eyebrow.

Newman had been using Vine, a video-sharing service that lets people post brief clips, since early 2014. One day in June, after she got her eyebrows done for the first time, she sat in the car while her mother shopped at Burlington Coat Factory and decided to make a video. Though she had posted clips here and there, this would be one of the first times that she spoke directly into the camera. And those words were “on fleek.”

“It just came to me out of the blue,” says Newman, who turns 17 in three days and goes by Peaches Monroe online. “I never heard of the word, and nobody else had heard of the word. I just said it, and I guess that’s what came out. That’s about it.”

With so many people re-posting and remixing the video on such sites as YouTube, it’s difficult to quantify the popularity of “on fleek.” The original video has had 28 million views on Vine, and on Instagram people have mentioned #onfleek some 200,000 times.

Brands and celebrities have repurposed Newman’s creation as well. Taco Bell **described itself** as “on fleek” in October, racking up more than 15,000 favorites and 19,000 retweets. A few days later, International House of Pancakes

posted a similar tweet and won even more favorites and retweets. Chris Brown and Lil Wayne have publicly uttered the phrase, and last week The New York Times included it in a language quiz about Internet-era slang, headlined “Are You on Fleek?”

II

Pancakes on fleek.— IHOP (@IHOP) October 21, 2014

“‘On fleek’ was absolutely part of the vocabulary that was being used by our guests, and we jumped into the conversation,” says Kirk Thompson, vice president of marketing at IHOP. He says that the decision to use the phrase was planned out, coming from “an expert panel of people that work on our social strategies,” including the marketing firm MRM/McCann. “That was one of our very best,” he says about the tweet.

Newman still finds it shocking that her words have made it into rap songs and corporate marketing strategies. “I didn’t know it was going to make history,” she says.

When her original clip first went viral, Newman was scared. “I got nervous because I didn’t know if I wanted my mom to see this,” she says. After all, her mother works at a church and doesn’t like it when Newman and her younger brother use profanity. “She wasn’t tripping about the fact that I cussed,” she says.

“It kind of threw me for a loop,” says Denise, Newman’s mother, whom she has since come around and even appears in her daughter’s videos from time to time.

Urban Dictionary **has a "fleck" entry** from 2003, defining the word as “smooth, nice, sweet,” **and another entry** from 2009, defining it as “awesome.” But “on fleek” in its current iteration seems entirely Newman’s invention. She sells “on fleek” merchandise online, though other people have trademark applications pending, including a company that describes itself as “New York’s premier organic brow threading bar.”

“‘Fleck’ has a kind of sensibility about it,” says Ben Huh, founder and CEO of Cheezburger, a network of websites devoted to memes and viral content. “Whether it’s [the similarity to] ‘fleet’ or the elongated ‘e’ sound, those things do have an impact.”

Huh adds that of all the social media services, Vine makes it particularly easy to grow and disseminate viral content because users tend to “remix” other people’s videos, leading to more eyeballs. “Because of the limited number of seconds that is its format, a lot of people are creating a high volume of videos,” Huh says. “People learn by trying, and so what happens is, as people create new things, many of them won’t work, but every once in a while a gem will come out.”

The Internet has myriad think pieces about the meaning behind “on fleek,” but Newman says the words contain a deeper message: It’s about being fabulous, comfortable in your own skin, an idea she wants to convey to her Vine followers. “I’m of course a big girl, so I always go for the big girls because I feel like they’re overlooked. I want to make them feel like they don’t have to be a [certain] size to define their character,” she says.

Her message seems to be getting across. Newman says people have contacted her from all over the world about how much her videos mean to them. In one piece of fan mail, a young gay man told her he had considered suicide but Newman’s positive messaging helped change his mind. “I was like, wow. Shocked. Me? How can that happen from just saying a few words?” she says.

Still, Newman is just a teenager. She had to delay an interview in order to study for the ACT test, and getting her driver's license and planning for college are on the not-so-distant horizon. She's also trying to come up with more phrases so that she's not a one-hit wonder. "I'm trying to think of some, but it's like, with me, it's just gonna flow."



Alberto E. Rodriguez/Getty

JAMES CORDEN HOPES TO KEEP YOU UP LATE LATE

WITH A VARIED CAREER THAT HAS SPANNED SUCCESS ON THE STAGE AS WELL AS TELEVISION, CORDEN, 36, MAY BE BETTER EQUIPPED FOR THE ROLE THAN MANY AMERICANS REALIZE.

When CBS postponed James Corden's debut as host of The Late Late Show, David Letterman feigned incredulity.

"Why are you here?" he asked Regis Philbin, the show's stand-in host that night, when Letterman appeared as a guest.

“Where’s the tubby kid? Why isn’t he ready?... I think something’s gone wrong or he’d be here.”

Letterman, whose production company owns and runs The Late Late Show, was just protecting his investment. He had already had Corden as a guest on his own show and knows better than anyone that successful late-night talk show hosts are invariably self-confident, smart, dapper and knowing.

So why would CBS hand such a valuable and prominent, if minor, gig to an unknown foreigner who has spent most of his career playing overweight goofs?

Corden says he landed the job almost by accident. Top CBS executives, especially Nina Tassler and Leslie Moonves, had been impressed by his work, and “CBS reached out and asked if I would write a sitcom,” Corden says. “I went in to talk about it. [Stephen] Colbert had just been announced [as Letterman’s successor], and I was saying what a genius appointment I thought that was.”

“James has got an opinion on everything,” says Ben Winston, Corden’s long-standing collaborator and now co-executive producer for The Late Late Show. “He just started telling them what he thought the future of late night was. We thought no more of it. Five months later, we were having a barbecue in James’s garden in London when the phone rang. CBS had offered him the job.”

With a varied career that has spanned success on the stage as well as television, Corden, 36, may be better equipped for the role than many Americans realize. Raised in a small town near London, the son of a Royal Air Force bandsman and a social worker, he landed his first big role in 2004 as the fat kid in The History Boys, Alan Bennett’s award-winning West End and Broadway play (later a movie). Popularity in the U.K. came when he co-wrote and co-starred in the BBC sitcom Gavin and Stacey, a gently

uneventful show about very ordinary young folk. Corden played a naive but lovable loser.

His career had a serious wobble when this newfound stardom went to his head. His private life became wild. An embarrassing speech at the BAFTA awards—in which he questioned why he had not won the best comedy award, a performance he describes as “ungracious, ungrateful and brattish”—was followed by a train wreck of a TV sketch-show series. A comedy film, *The Lesbian Vampire Killers*, was a critical and box-office disaster, and the U.K. press was reporting the death of his career.



Actor James Corden poses for a portrait in New York May 2, 2012. Corden has been pegged as the next host of "The Late Late Show," taking over from the underrated Craig Ferguson. Credit: Victoria Will/Reuters

Resurrection came through prominent appearances in marathon children's charity fund-raisers for the BBC, organized with Winston. Then his starring role in the stage comedy *One Man, Two Guvnors* brought rave reviews (The New York Times called him "a comic star in Britain who

seems poised to become one here in short order”), awards in London and a Tony in New York in 2012. A TV comedy-thriller, *The Wrong Mans*, written with co-star Mathew Baynton, was well received, and he has been hosting a comic panel show about sport for four years.

Much of his comic acting has been physical slapstick, trading on his size (although he has lost several dozen pounds in recent years), and this infuses his persona as a presenter and host. He loves inventing daft scenarios and cajoling celebrity guests and audience members alike into joining in his little fantasies, which they have generally done with surprise and pleasure.

Neither Corden nor Winston is prepared to share many details about the format for the CBS show, beyond saying that guests will all be on together, as on the popular BBC America series *The Graham Norton Show*. And they have hinted that Corden, who has never been a stand-up comedian, may shorten or even dispense with the traditional opening monologue. Otherwise, both use the word experimental to describe the format they are working toward and declare that the network seems happy with whatever they’ve come up with. “CBS has been unbelievably hands-off,” says Corden. “They say, ‘Just go and make your show and tell us what you need.’”

Many English comics have succeeded in America, and Corden doesn’t seem daunted by operating in an alien culture. “The world is a much smaller place than it used to be,” he says. “I don’t see the divide as being as big as it was before the Internet. America is an incredible place. Here in Los Angeles I’ve met some of the most incredible, creative people I’ve ever met. They make *The Simpsons* here. It’s a thrilling place to be.”

“It’s not about ripping up the rule book,” says Winston, “because we grew up in England, so we never really read it.

“James is one of those comedians that I hope America will love,” he continues. “He’s embracing. He’s kind. He

never wants to laugh at anyone's misfortune. He wants to be laughing with the room rather than at a guest. I hope that with that warmth we can get a different perspective on the artists we have on the show."

Corden sounds tired when we talk, having been kept up half the night by his 3-year-old son and baby daughter. When I suggest he must be feeling a mixture of intense excitement and blind terror, he chuckles. "I think I've been feeling that for about the last five years, but it's more exhilarating than exhausting. You're constantly trying to second-guess yourself. Is this right? Is this something that just feels good in this room? Will it still feel good if I'm watching in Nebraska at 1 a.m.?"

01

RAGGED GLORY

Tikrit, Iraq — An Iraqi fighter tries to plant a Shiite flag in the ground as fellow fighters exchange fire with Islamic State (ISIS) militants battling for control of Saddam Hussein's hometown on March 12. The Shiite militia known as Hashid Shaabi has been aligned with Iraqi security forces in the biggest joint effort yet to push out ISIS militants after they overran the region last spring. On March 16, after taking back some districts surrounding the center of Tikrit, the Iraqi government announced it was pausing its offensive to call up reinforcements and minimize civilian casualties.



02

KNOCK-KNOCK

Ferguson, Missouri - A police tactical team prepares to enter a home March 12 as it searches for a suspect after the shooting of two police officers during protests over alleged racism within the department. One officer was shot in the shoulder and another near his ear; both were treated and released. On March 17, Jeffrey Williams was charged with the shooting after tips from the community led police to his home. The 20-year-old suspect admitted he had fired the shots from a moving vehicle but said he was aiming for someone else, according to police.



Christian Gooden/St. Louis Post-Dispatch/AP

03

BYE-BYE BIBI?

Jerusalem - An ultra-Orthodox man watches workers put up a large billboard of Benjamin Netanyahu ahead of Israel's March 17 parliamentary elections. Trailing in the polls, the three-term prime minister tried to appeal to right-wing voters by declaring he would not allow the creation of a Palestinian state and would challenge the U.S. if it reaches an agreement with Iran on its nuclear program. He also ran ads warning that ISIS was waiting to attack and that only he is capable of stopping them.



Abir Sultan/EPA

04

BLOWN AWAY

Port Vila, Vanuatu - A boy kicks a ball as his father searches through the ruins of their home in the aftermath of Cyclone Pam, which struck the South Pacific island nation March 16. Early reports painted a picture of utter destruction after the monster cyclone tore through the country with 185 mph winds, killing at least 24 people, according to officials. President Baldwin Lonsdale told Reuters that more than 90 percent of the island's buildings had been destroyed and said climate change was a contributing factor in the changing weather patterns that caused the cyclone.



Dave Hunt/Pool/Reuters